# XBOX WORLD

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+ KINECT SHOUT GUIDE

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# CALL OF DUTY® BLACK OPS II

15

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# XBOX WORLD

## SMARTER XBOX GAMING

Love it or hate it, everyone has an opinion on Call Of Duty. Xbox World has always been the mag to tell it like it is when it comes to COD, and although we've been relatively underwhelmed by previous Treyarch games, we've got a good feeling about Black Ops 2. Find out why in our monster feature, starting on p50.

We've got a good feeling about the future of Xbox too. Xbox World has spent the last year talking to developers, asking what they want to see from the next generation. You'll find their answers in our feature on p58. See, we go further than our competitors to get the big stories – that's why we're the UK's best-selling unofficial Xbox 360 magazine. That's why we actually get access to games like *Halo 4* (p18), *FIFA 13* (p14) and *Assassin's Creed III* (p22), when everyone else is just guessing about them. And, it's why we've got such a great community of readers, podcast listeners and social media followers. Want to join the thriving XBW network? Catch us on Facebook and Twitter (@XboxWorldMag) and bring your opinions on *Call Of Duty*... or anything else. Enjoy the issue.

**Andy Hartup, Associate Editor**

## SCAN IT!

SCAN IT! Subscribe to XBW

You'll find these little boxes scattered around the mag like poems written by sad robots. They're actually called QR codes, and they're crazy cool. Whip out a smartphone with a QR reader app – don't worry, they're all free – and you're a scan and bleep away from bonus online content like game trailers, expanded interviews, extra screens and much more. To read the code, just activate your scanner (see below), hold the phone up to the page, and frame the box so the edges line up. You should hear a bleep, then be given the option to view the content online. Try moving the phone slowly back and forth so the camera refocuses if it doesn't read immediately. This one will take you to the XBW subscriptions page...

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# »MENU

**ON THE COVER**

XBW #119

## 50 BLACK OPS II

Xbox World goes to California to see Treyarch's sequel to the biggest game in the world – *Black Ops*. For the first time it's a *Call Of Duty* where your decisions matter, with branching storylines, moral choices, and open battlefields you can approach from any angle. It's a revolution for *Call Of Duty* and you'll read about it on page 50


## 58 DEVELOPERS DESIGN THE NEXT GENERATION

The world's greatest game developers discuss their shopping list for the next generation of Xbox

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Take a look at the biggest and best games on Live Arcade, and the hidden gems everyone forgot about

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Xbox World contributor Richard Cobbett on why forced multiplayer modes spoil great games

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Our man in Japan talks with Shinji Mikami and Keiji Inafune about the future of Japanese gaming

## 88 WHY I LOVE: HALF LIFE

Dan Griliopoulos goes on a whistle-stop tour of the entire *Half Life* universe, and wonders what Valve have in store for *Half Life 3*

## 09 DAY ONE

The biggest and best new games on Xbox 360 in our monthly look at everything new. Fantasy assassinate-'em-up *Dishonored* takes centre stage in a month featuring *Assassin's Creed III, Resident Evil 6, Hitman Absolution*, and *FIFA 13*

## 29 PRIMER

With E3 only days away we're bringing you expert analysis and opinion on Microsoft's biggest annual gaming event. Elsewhere, Xbox World's own Matthew Pellett visits Gearbox, Microsoft sell an Xbox for $99, and readers have their say on the excellent *Metal Gear Solid*

## 117 UPGRADE

Become a gaming legend in seconds with the world's finest tips, tech, and buying guides. This month: be the a Witcherer Witcher in *The Witcher 2*, dog dragons in *Dragon's Dogma*, and, er... treat yourself to a new smartphone

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The first of 2012's *Fable* spin-offs

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Survivors whinge about zombies

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Disappointing hack and slasher

## TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

**MICHAEL GAPPER**
**FEATURES EDITOR**
"I never stay less than four-star" Mike spent the month fuming over reviews of his mag-funded E3 hotel. "Stained carpets," said one; "bedbugs," claimed another. "No air conditioning! Blood-stained bed! Terrifying area!" Little does LA know, it's about to get a whole lot more blood-stained and terrifying.

**ANDY KELLY**
**GAMES EDITOR**
Internationally-despised pariah Andy Kelly faced the full fury of Youtube's commenters when he criticised *Max Payne 3* in a video review. Literally thousands queued up to call him a dick, but the joke's on them. Working in this office, Andy has developed powerful immunities to verbal abuse.

**BEN GRIFFIN**
**STAFF WRITER**
Alarmingly tall mystery man Ben vanishes every evening at five on the dot and nobody sees or hears from him until nine the next day. Smart money says he spends his evenings getting his money's worth from his Lovefilm subscription, but outside odds say he's Batman.

**MILFORD COPPOCK**
**MANAGING ART EDITOR**
Milf's unusual name was perfectly fine until the day the first American Pie hit cinemas. 13 years later, it was his time for revenge. American Pie: The Reunion will have to do without that extra £6.50 from Bath's Odeon, make no mistake.

**PHIL HAYCRAFT**
**DEPUTY ART EDITOR**
"Silence is golden" goes the old saying, and nobody says it quieter than Sam Fisher-esque art ninja Phil. His silence is *so* golden, he drives to work in a solid gold car, wearing gold shoes, and smoking a gold pipe. It's a slow journey, and one conducted in *absolute silence*.

# ON THE DISC

## A double-sided dose of Xbox World

**HD MOVIES**
All of the videos on the B-side are in HD and viewable on Xbox 360, a PC or a Mac

*My Xbox>Video Library>Current Disc*

**PODCASTS**
Listen to the latest and greatest podcasts from Xbox World and special guests

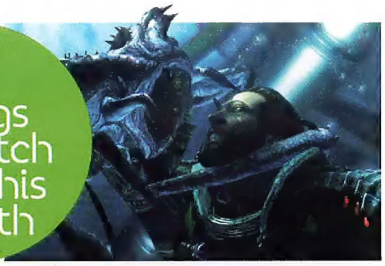
*My Xbox >Music Library>Current Disc*

**WALLPAPERS**
Spruce up your computer, Mac or even your Xbox 360 with the latest official wallpapers

*My Xbox>Picture Library>Current Disc*

Our game-changing double-sided DVD is a world first. On the disc's A-side we've created a TV show featuring in-game action and interview content you can't get anywhere else. And on the B-side we've got even more great footage you just won't want to miss: the freshest game trailers in gorgeous high-definition, a DVD-exclusive podcast and much, much more...

## 3 things to watch first this month



### 1 LOST PLANET 3

Stay frosty! We've got first footage from Capcom's latest mech-shooter

### 2 GHOST RECON: FS

See hi-tech warfare in pin-sharp HD with this pair of fresh videos

### 3 SLEEPING DOGS

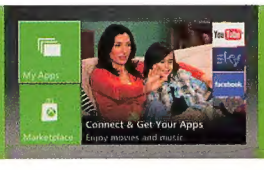
Ass-kicking, car-thrashing, gun-shooting action in this Hong-Kong set thriller

## HOW TO

Use your shiny, action-packed media disc

To view the new Xbox World show, simply pop your disc label-side up (see right) into your Xbox 360 and press Play DVD on the Dashboard. Easy.

Insert the DVD label side down to access the B-side content. It'll register as a 'Mixed Media Disc', so scroll right to Apps to watch in HD...




FAULTY DISC? Send it to Disc Replacement, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW

# THE XBOX WORLD SHOW

## The world's only monthly gaming TV show

### WELCOME

Welcome to the Xbox World TV show. It's the only place you'll find a perfect balance between footage of hot new 360 games, and expert opinion on the best Xbox has to offer – both old and new. And it's only available with Xbox World magazine.

### DAY ONE – STEEL BATTALION

We love the heavy mech combat, but remain unconvinced that Kinect has the technical chops to control such an advanced sim. Judge for yourself in this action-heavy gameplay video.

### WATCH OUT!

Like the Renegade Master, I'm back once again. I've pulled together yet another barnstorming DVD this month.

*Resident Evil 6* is the star of the show where trailers are concerned. It leads a strong line-up of hot new games, including *BioShock Infinite* and *Lost Planet 3*. We've also got a great interview with Gearbox on *Aliens Colonial Marines*.

It isn't just about the big, disc-based releases though. This month's review game *Trials Evolution* proves that XBLA is home to some of 360's best games. We back that theory up by talking about super-smart puzzler *Braid* in our Time Xtend section.

As ever, once you've watched the TV Show on side A, make sure you flip the DVD for even more awesome 360 trailers and features.

### INTERVIEW

Brian Martel from Gearbox takes time out to talk *Aliens Colonial Marines*. Set as a sequel to the Cameron film, *Colonial Marines* is aiming to be the most authentic Aliens game to date. Have they managed it? Martel has the answers.

### PRIMER – RESI 6

Capcom's big-budget zombie slaying game leads our action-packed Day One section. The trailer is a must-watch. We've also got first footage from *Epic Mickey 2*, *Lost Planet 3*, and some fresh action from *DMC Devil May Cry* and *BioShock Infinite*.

### REVIEW – TRIALS EVOLUTION

XBLA sequel *Trials Evolution* gets the review treatment this issue. Is it the best downloadable game ever? Its mad, compelling acing makes a great case, but our panel of experts is tough to impress...

### TIME XTEND – BRAID

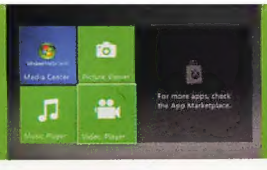
We remember Jonathan Blow's time-bending masterpiece, recalling our favourite levels and discussing the hidden meaning behind the game's plot. Does the game stand the test of time? Fittingly, it does: and it remains one of the best games on XBLA.

1 Welcome
2 Day One
3 Interview
4 Primer
5 Epic Mickey 2
6 BioShock Infinite
7 DMC: Devil May Cry
8 Lost Planet 3
9 Resident Evil 6
10 Review – Trials Evolution
11 Time Xtend – Braid
12 B-Side Contents
13 Credits. And out-takes!

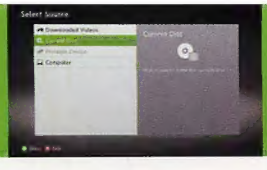
So stop your grinnin', drop your linen and, er, start watching the DVD...

**Matthew Pellett**
**Disc Editor**

In 'My Apps' you'll find 'Video Player', 'Music Player' and 'Picture Viewer', which take you to our trailers, podcasts and wallpapers respectively



Once you've picked your App, simply select Current Disc as your source to access the B-side directory and hours of extra content from Xbox World



From the maker of DAWN OF THE DEAD and from the producer of NO MORE HEROES

# LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW™

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# DAY ONE

The hottest games on our pre-order radar this month!

## THIS MONTH


10.... Dishonored
14.... Crysis 3
15.... FIFA 13
16.... Hitman Absolution
18.... Halo 4
20.... Resident Evil 6
21.... PES 13
22.... Assassin's Creed 3
24.... Deadlight
26.... Lego Batman 2
27.... Game of Thrones


TIME-BENDING STEAMPUNK STEALTH VICTORIANA? IS **DISHONORED** FORGING A WHOLE NEW GENRE...

**WHY I'M PRE-ORDERING**



*"In a word: choice. In another word: murder. Dishonored's impressive range of tools and toys that you can use to take out targets makes this a winner. A bloody, stabby winner"*
**Andy Hartup**

## * THE BIG SHOT

# DISHONOR

ED

DAY ONE

# POSSESS FISH, KILL WITH RATS AND BLOW ENEMIES INTO SMALL CHUNKS IN THIS PROMISING ASSASSIN SIM FROM BETHESDA

**DETAILS**

**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / Bethesda
**Developer** / Arkane
**Release** / September

**We love being pleasantly surprised by a game. And, as *Dishonored*'s supernatural assassin hero, Corvo physically possesses his target, walks him out onto the balcony of high-class brothel the Golden Cat Bathhouse, then quickly jumps out of his body and blasts him over the railings with a supernatural gust of wind... yeah, we're very pleasantly surprised. *Dishonored* is officially on our radar.**

There are a few misconceptions about this game, which we'll put to rest now. *Dishonored* isn't about free-roaming or making tough moral choices. It isn't really an RPG. It's about playing through levels and taking out targets in unusual, creative ways. It owes more to *BioShock* and *Deus Ex* than *Mass Effect* or *Skyrim*.

The above example is part of developer Arkane's 'stealth' playthrough. In this hugely divided world, where the rich live in city districts separated from the poor by armed guards, Corvo's assignment is to remove three aristocratic brothers from the Golden Cat. How he does that is entirely up to you. Arkane even tell us that you don't have to actually kill any of your quarries. For now, though, this stealth playthrough sees our hero infiltrate the building by possessing a fish and then swimming up through an inlet pipe, killing another target by trapping him in a steam room and cranking up the temperature, and silently choking guards before hiding them on balconies and overhanging pipes. There's a pleasingly smooth silent takedown where Corvo dashes towards and enemy, chokes him from behind, before hoisting him straight onto his shoulder for a fireman's lift, in one quick movement. It's all very aggressive, very slick stealth.

Stealth is the way forward, but if you have to blast away, Corvo has the kit

SCAN IT!

First CG trailer
goo.gl/pE86W

These guys make sure the poor don't bother the wealthy folk at home

During the stealth playthrough we also see Corvo use Dark Vision to spot enemies through walls and track their patrol patterns, and eavesdrop on the brothel's employees to get clues about the locations of his targets. All Arkane's smartest ideas have gone into stealth, so we suspect this is how you'll get the most pleasure from *Dishonored*.

## GOING LOUD

Next we see a more violent playthrough of the same area. At street level, prostitutes mill around flirting with guards, and tattered posters saying 'Report any sickness' cling to grimy walls. Although the targets are still inside the Golden Cat, they've changed locations (you can play the same level several times and find enemies in entirely different places), but Corvo has the tools to find them. According to Arkane, there are eight or nine different ways to infiltrate the building, and that'll be the same across all of *Dishonored*'s story levels.

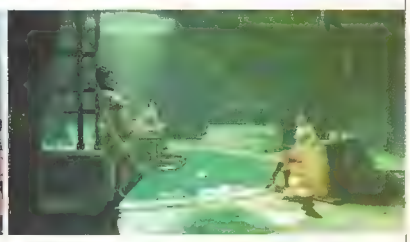
This time he enters the brothel via the roof, air-assassinating a guard by plunging his sword into the victim's neck to break his own fall. Leaping in through an unshuttered window, he massacres his way through the opposition. One ability lets him stop time to line up shots from a wrist-mounted pistol, while another lets Corvo unleash a swarm of rats on his attackers. Seen the CG trailer? If not, scan the QR code or hit the link on this page now. It shows actual abilities that you'll use in-game. Corvo even has grenades that blow guards into small chunks, and fire arrows that immolate their target with ferocious efficiency. And lots of screaming.

*Dishonored*'s colourful world reminds us of the original *BioShock*

> *"HE SILENTLY CHOKES GUARDS BEFORE QUICKLY STASHING THEIR BODIES ON BALCONIES AND OVERHANGING PIPES"*

After murdering the brothers for a second time, Arkane head outside to show off more of the game's combat. After slicing up a few guards with Corvo's short-sword, they head to a large, open area patrolled by enemies wearing mechanical stilts. It's obvious that open combat is the one area of weakness in *Dishonored*, as even the developer driving the demo has trouble taking these guys down. Using a combination of pistol blasts and possessions, he finally whittles the guards down to their last man, before jumping into his body and striding through an electrified checkpoint to end the level.

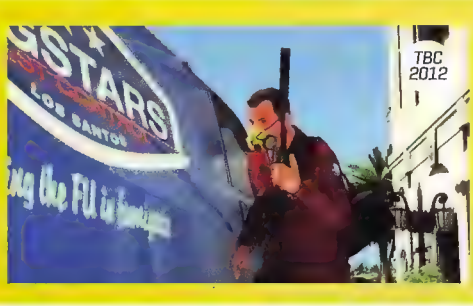
Based on this first demo, we're seriously impressed by *Dishonored*. The aggressive stealth looks satisfying, and the hand-painted art style brings the game's steampunk world to life in a way that reminds us why we first fell in love with *BioShock*. A very, very pleasant surprise. ■



Don't expect to have all Corvo's killer skills unlocked from the start

## INFO BURST

Bite-sized updates on the spiciest new software




### GTA V

*Following the delay to BioShock Infinite, many have started speculating that GTA V will launch in October – the assumption being that 2K have cleared their Christmas schedule for Rockstar (who are owned by 2K) to park GTA V in. This seems hugely unlikely to us given that a) no one outside Rockstar has actually seen GTA V running yet, and b) Rockstar have released every single this-gen game during their preferred April-May launch window. Our take on it? Expect GTA V in May 2013, with a first showing of gameplay this summer. You can start getting ready for GTA V by playing Max Payne 3's multiplayer, which lets you transfer your crew (read: clan) to GTA V when it comes out.*

*Enslaved* meets *Halo* meets German technical wizardry

NEW SHOTS

# CRYSIS 3

## *Why is Prophet bringing a bow to a gunfight?*

**C*rysis 3*'s first wave of features impacted with tidal force – New York nanodome! Bow and arrow! Prophet's back!? – drenching us with details and soaking us with visual splendour.** Since then, Crytek's closed up shop, glancing at watches and hurrying back to their Frankfurt studios to prepare a 2013 release. But that doesn't mean the info pantry is completely bare.

Did you catch a glimpse of the transforming bow's front-mounted tripod? It'll steady your weapon at the cost of mobility, but our guess would be that it's also responsible for changing the effect of arrows.

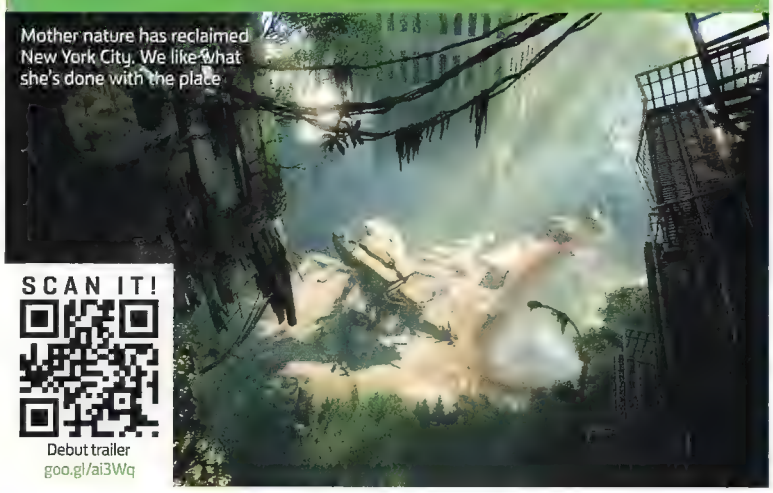
DETAILS

**Format** Xbox 360
**Publisher**
**Developer**
**Release**

You can also shoot standard arrows without disrupting your cloak, placing a larger emphasis on stealth.

Just as important is *who* you'll explode. Enemies come in two flavours: the orange-goo-filled Ceph and the evil-as-standard C.E.L.L.

There are fears the 360 version will play second fiddle to faster and more powerful hardware. Perhaps, but from what we've seen, the console version is still stunning – expect more at E3 soon.



Mother nature has reclaimed New York City. We like what she's done with the place

SCAN IT!

Debut trailer
goo.gl/ai3Wq

LATEST INFO

# FIFA 13

## *The footie champ returns with a heavily tinkered squad*

ARCH RIVAL

*PES 13*
*Like its league rival, PES 2013 is going for a radical overhaul. Konami promise full manual passing and shooting, plus enhanced first touch – er, quite like FIFA – see our early hands-on on page 21*

SCAN IT!
First information
goo.gl/ZeFdW

The tweaked Player Impact engine will favour beefier footballers

Nimble players like Robinho will enjoy greater mobility

DETAILS

**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / EA
**Developer** / EA Canada
**Release** / September

**Like that tiny, baldy man presenting a new Galáctico at Real Madrid every summer, each season *FIFA* rolls out a new, potentially game-changing feature. Last year, it was the polarising tactical defending. For this campaign, though, developers EA Canada want to bring in a touch of class.**

More accurately, it's going to sort the upper tier of players from the hoi polloi with the new First Touch Control system. Only world class players like new cover star Lionel Messi will be able to trap the ball cleanly time after time. Lesser players will often miss the ball if the pass is overhit, thanks to new physics parameters affecting pass trajectory or the proximity of the closest defender.

While this could frustrate fans who play with lower league outfits, EA are keen to implement this added layer of error and unpredictability. Battles for possession will be more ferocious and prolonged, with new push-and-pull mechanics. That doesn't mean Stoke-esque hoof merchants gain an unfair advantage, though: a revamped Complete Dribbling system promises to give attackers greater mobility. The new additions to *FIFA*'s squad might not be as radical as last year, but they've definitely got the potential to improve – or unbalance – EA's juggernaut. We're yet to go hands-on, so judgement is withheld. ■

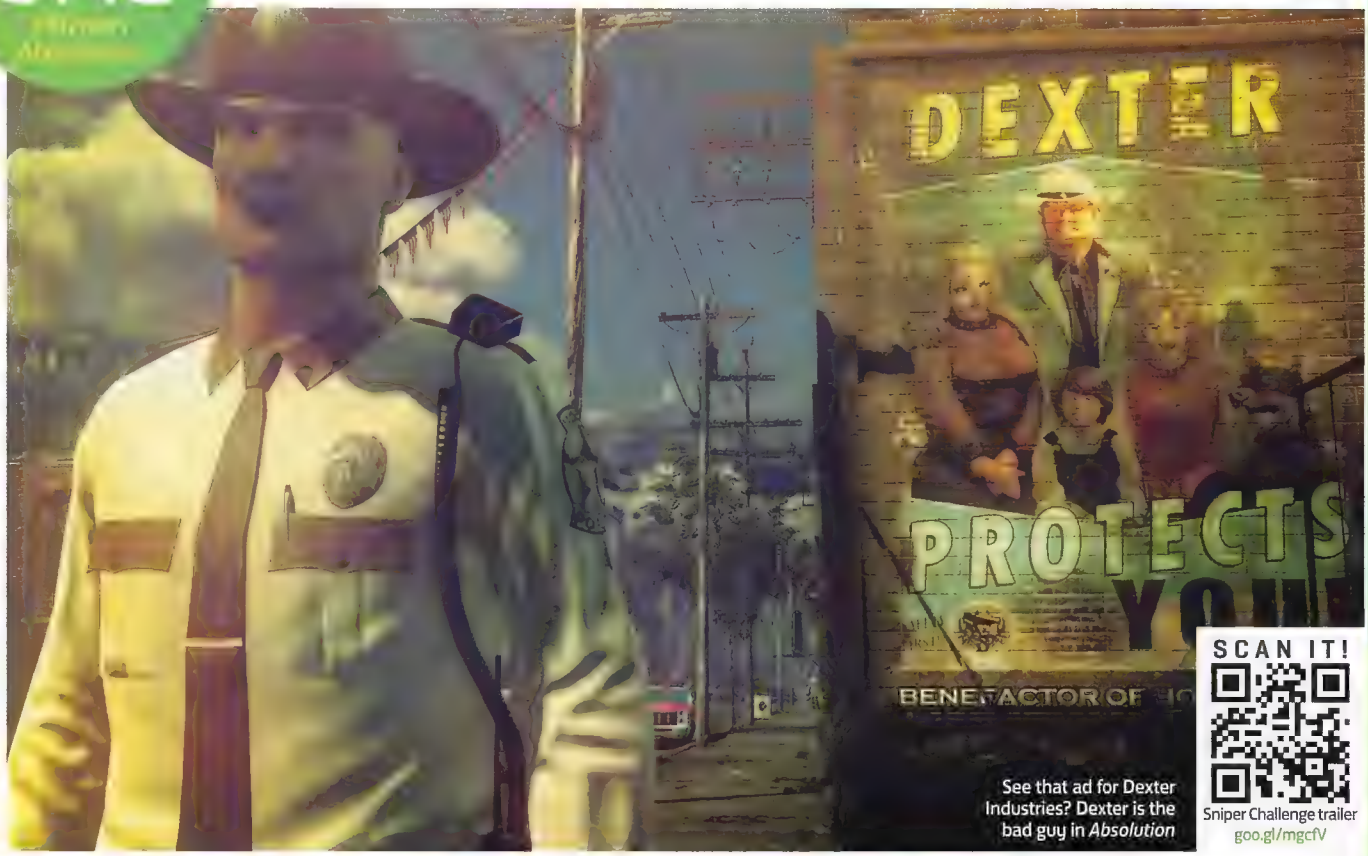
## INFO BURST

### STAR TREK

*Missed our cover feature last issue? Shame on you, but the new Star Trek game is a co-op shooter where you play as Kirk and Spock. Expect light puzzle elements, epic set pieces and zero gravity spacewalks. It's made by Darkness 2 devs Digital Extremes and fills in the story between the JJ Abrams films.*

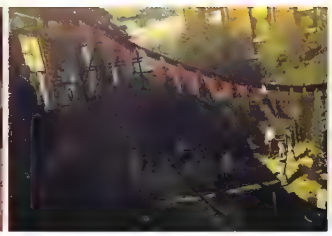
### MADDEN NFL 13

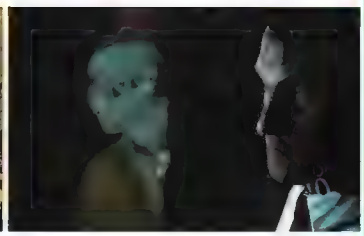
*The fans have spoken, and EA has announced the new cover star of Madden 13 is Calvin Johnson. EA want every part of the game – from menus to loading screens to in-game – to feel like a real CBS broadcast. That means pundits constantly chatting, camera tricks, and plenty of swooshing replays.*

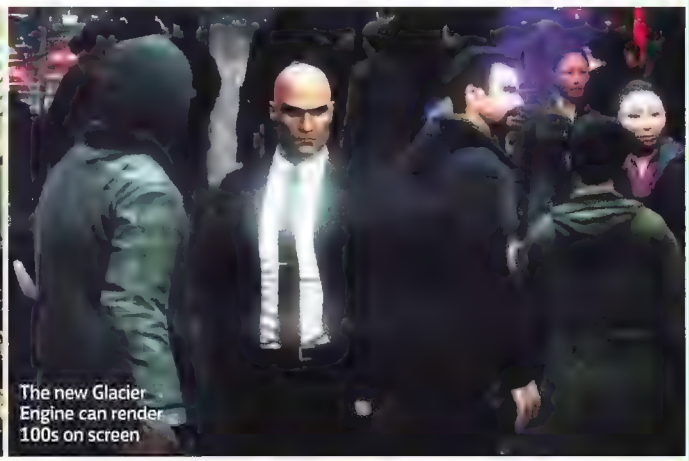



See that ad for Dexter Industries? Dexter is the bad guy in *Absolution*

SCAN IT!
Sniper Challenge trailer
goo.gl/mgcfV







The new Glacier Engine can render 100s on screen

## INFO BURST

### SLEEPING DOGS

*We recently sat down for a chat with the developers of the game formerly known as True Crime Hong Kong. Turns out, it's pretty brutal. You can feed enemies into ice-crushers, impale them on swordfish spears, and er, clobber them to death with an old lady's purse. Full preview next issue.*

### TOMB RAIDER

*Another casualty of delay, the new Raider has been shifted back to 'between Jan and March 2013'. Shame. The game's fresh take on Lara – casting her as a vulnerable young woman on a nightmarish tropical island – has it close to the top of our 'Most Wanted' list. For now, here's a single new screen...*

LATEST INFO

# HITMAN ABSOLUTION

## *Open worlds and electric fence kills restore the faith*

**DETAILS**

**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / [illegible]
**Developer** / IO Interactive
**Release** / 30 November

You already know about the [illegible] Glacier 2 engine able to render hundred-strong crowds. You know about Agent 47's 'instinct' talents, which lets him follow enemy petrol routes and spy silhouettes through solid walls. You even know about contextual kills, from the gruesome (a ledge-drag down multiple storeys) to the comical (a head-bash with a potted marijuana plant), but there's still plenty to learn before the kill spree starts in November.

Barely escaping *Blood Money* alive, chased by shadowy secret society Alpha Zerox, *Absolution* sees a hunted 47 turn hunter – Jason Bourne with a barcode. IO Interactive haven't committed to a linear timeframe, so the presumption must be that the storyline flits back and forwards through his murky world. But it's not linear narrative people are worried about: it's linear levels.

After all, a cinematic stalk through cop-heavy Chicago (you'll have seen the walkthrough) was basically one straight line. Where are *Hitman*'s puzzle-box hubs? Can we still drop a piano on someone's head? *Absolution* shows its hand later, revealing crowd-blending mechanics, wardrobe changes, intricate setups and multiple-route stealth through hospitals, orphanges, mercenary camps and suburbs.

Post-level newspapers attest to your triumphs. As before, they'll chart body counts, methods of dispatch and overall ratings. They make for entertaining reading. An electrified fence execution, for example, prompts the sheriff to quote: "A fence hooked up to a mega-voltage generator is no laughing matter." It is. *Absolution*'s a darker, smarter *Hitman*: blockbuster production values, completely optional action and, importantly, plenty of new ways to kill. ■

### JET SET RADIO HD

*The world's most colourful ASBO game will soon arrive on XBLA. While aspects like the iconic soundtrack and the loveable cast of characters will return intact (and in HD), there will be new graffiti tags in the game, designed by fans. They've been vetted by Sega, though, so don't expect too many giant cocks.*

### FAMILY GUY: BACK TO THE MULTIVERSE

*The first Family Guy game was rotten, missing the point of the show's humour completely. While the whole cast is signed up for this sequel, the first press release talks more about the 'popularity of the brand' than the quality of the game. Our first preview here: goo.gl/lvMSP*

### THE HARD SELL

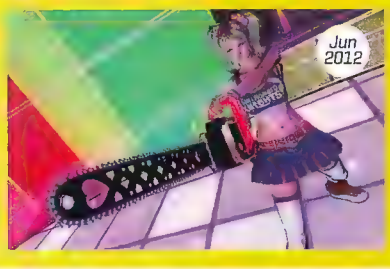
*"It's no secret that Cortana has a short lifespan and is going to undergo rampancy [an evil AI combo of hyper-intelligent megalomania]. It's going to be an emotional journey, and Cortana is at the heart of that."*
**Frank O'Connor, franchise director**

LATEST INFO

# HALO 4

## 343 Industries are taming the rampant Halo universe

### INFO BURST




**LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW**
*Grasshopper's demented design is perfect back-of-the-box fodder: undead punk rockers, chainsaw-wielding cheerleaders, disembodied boyfriend heads that can be kicked at zombies, driveable combine harvesters and a soundtrack containing Suda 51 favourite Mindless Self Indulgence. Review next issue.*

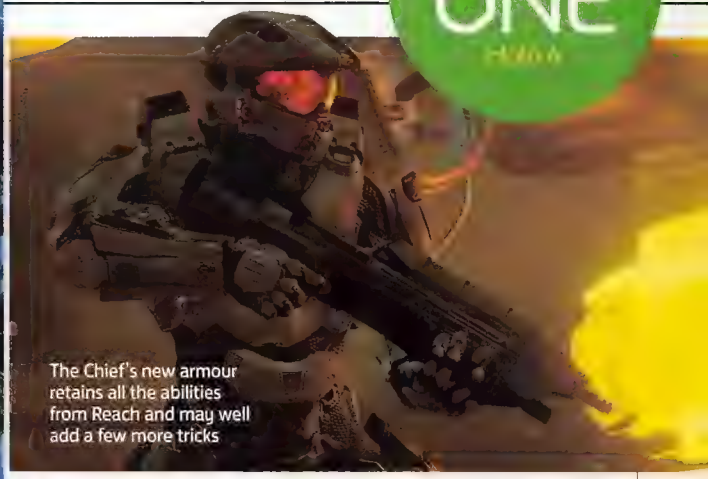
**FAR CRY 3**
*Sun, fire and hallucinogens – they'll keep you busy in Far Cry's dubstep-fuelled third, which injects a little outdoor pursuit between gunfights with zip-lining, cliff-climbing and cartography. We've played the CoD-meets-Counter-Strike multiplayer too, and it's a belter. More on the map editor soon.*

Expect to see Elites and Grunts in the first few levels, new enemies later in the campaign

SCAN IT!

First look documentary
goo.gl/CzXVH

DAY ONE



The Chief's new armour retains all the abilities from Reach and may well add a few more tricks

DETAILS

**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / Microsoft
**Developer** / 343 Industries
**Release** / 6 November

**They're new to developing *Halo*, but 343 Industries know the world of Master Chief better than anyone. So while Bungie skip off to IPs new, 343 are bringing together all the strands from comics, novels, merchandise and (of course) games to create a coherent backstory for *Halo 4*. And from our hands-on with the new game, we're happy to say it's paying off.**

For example, the UNSC Infinity (seeded in last year's Glasslands novel) has a key role in the parallel SPARTAN-IV campaign. The red vs blue multiplayer gets dragged in too, taking place on the combat deck of the Infinity. On board the ship, you'll create a SPARTAN and keep his progress through co-op and competitive elements. Co-op comes in as Spartan Ops, a weekly download of five missions plus cinematics. This'll be free – although if it's not part of an online pass deal, our eyebrows will shoot off in amazement.

For the multiplayer, we were dropped into Wraparound, one of the new maps, for a game of classic Slayer deathmatch. *Halo 4* will keep the Armor Abilities from *Reach*. Choose from returning favourites, like the classic decoy, and newcomers such as Forerunner Vision, which sends out a pulse that locates enemies through walls. 343 have kept the feel and made it friendlier, with points rolling in for helpful play, not just kills.

Then a round of the new Regicide mode. Based on figures that show a lot of people try *Halo* online just once, get their arses handed to them in a punishment bun, and never return, Regicide makes life a easier for newcomers by offering an increasing bounty on the deadliest player. All very promising. And the biggest relief of all? It's home to a brand new class of enemy, so the Chief won't be fending off the same old waves of Grunts and Elites. ■

Jul 2012

### VIRTUA FIGHTER 5: FINAL SHOWDOWN

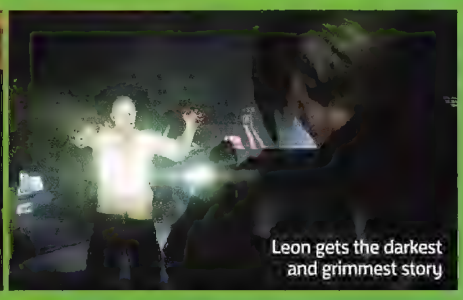
*The core game's been lighting up Japanese arcades since 2006, but this downloadable 'definitive version' features new moves, costumes, and online one-on-one's with ladder matches and lobbies. Oh, and a bunch of reductions to animation frames. You know, for the die-hards.*

TBC 2012

### DMC: DEVIL MAY CRY

*Dante needed a makeover, and in Ninja Theory's dark fantasy hack-and-slash, he's got one. A teenager/terrorist [in the eyes of the media] in the habit of pizza-munching and sleeping around, he's pursued by a sentient metropolis called Limbo City which reassuringly spews out plenty of demons to bash.*

Muller won't need that gun long; Wesker's blood comes with some perks



Leon gets the darkest and grimmest story

NEW INFO

# RESIDENT EVIL 6

## *Three ways to fight a war on terror in 2012's biggest action game*

**DETAILS**

**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / Capcom
**Developer** / Capcom
**Release** / 2 October

Fifteen years after the events of *Resi 2*'s Raccoon City outbreak the United States' President is caught up in a new epidemic. When the Tall Oaks University campus is subjected to a bio-terror attack the President is among the first to be infected and is gunned down by his own secret service agent, Leon Kennedy. Now, wanted for the President's murder, Kennedy has to escape a town overrun with the undead and in danger of imminent sterilisation, while government forces attempt to bring him in.

Capcom's first gameplay demo focuses on Leon Kennedy's classic-style campaign, set in the grounds of the town-sized university campus. It's a gothic horror adventure in the style of the first *Resi* and it's 15 minutes before Leon even fires a shot. But when the shooting does start, it doesn't stop. *Resi 6* serves up zombies by the dozen – proper, classic, flesh-eating, living dead zombies – and gives Leon the tools to handle them. There's a cover system, twin-stick controls, a diving evade, and a prone firing position.

But Leon's adventure is the *quietest* of *Resi 6*'s three campaigns. At E3 we'll go hands-on with the first 15 minutes of Leon's Tall Oaks story, Chris Redfield's all-action shootout on the streets of Lanshiang, and Jake Muller's punch-up on the battlefields of Edonia. These stages are ten hours apiece, so the demos will be just a taste of one of the year's biggest games, and you can read about it right here in next month's XBW.

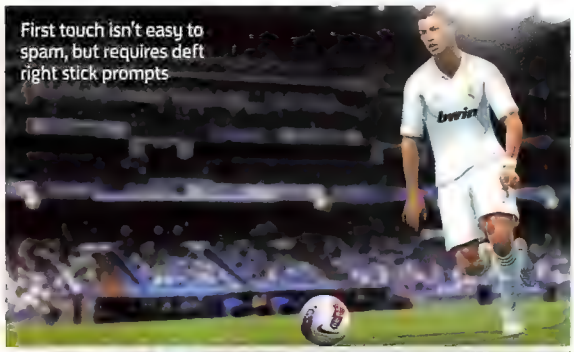
The munchees very quickly become the munchers in *Resi 6*

SCAN IT!
Story trailer
goo.gl/gGph5

* FIRST SCREENS

# PES 2013

## *Hands-on suggests Konami may reclaim critical high ground*


First touch isn't easy to spam, but requires deft right stick prompts

Manual shooting is sensitive but powerful with the top players

**DETAILS**
**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / Konami
**Developer** / Konami
**Release** / Autumn

**PES 2013 could top *FIFA 13*, suggests our early hands-on. Konami are layering on buzzword features, like PES Full Control – manual passing/shooting, plus revised first touch – but for us it's all about *feel*.**

Ronaldo is *absurd* – almost a cheat character. We beat three defenders using deft stick touches alone. Iniesta does a quick foot-roll thing (with no button prompts) allowing for super tight control, Kaka glides like real-life, Robben dribbles with that weird, upright accuracy – it's all part of the new Player ID system, with 50 uncannily realistic star players.

R adds closer control and fiddly tricks, but dribbling is *very* intuitive – more responsive than *FIFA*. Manual passing is like last year (good), but manual shooting (L) is a revelation. It's unsettling at first, like a sensitive version of *FIFA*'s finesse modifier, but we soon curled in a sweet 30-yarder with Ronaldo. Star players can beat men with their first touch via R – we only used it effectively a few times in ten matches, so it's far from a cheat.

Visually, it's better than *PES 2012*, although animations still look a little 'canned'. But player likenesses and special moves are incredible, like John Terry's last-gasp torpedo dive. Tackling needs work, but this is early code.

*FIFA* is more fluid, *PES* sharper – it's your call. One thing is for sure though: *PES* has lost the arcade zip of recent years, opting for a slower, sim-style pace. *FIFA 13* needs to make big strides if it's to come out on top. ■

SCAN IT!
Ronaldo trailer
goo.gl/BMfxv

Player ID means 50 star players are accurate in every small detail

LATEST INFO

# ASSASSIN'S CREED III

*Twistier conspiracies, bigger battles, and... Tea Parties!*

In game Connor can use these rifles to shoot one foe, then stab another

## INFO BURST

### RISEN 2

*After Skyrim and Dragon's Dogma, it's easy to overlook this fantasy RPG. Do that and you'll miss out on a sea-faring adventure with an alcoholic pirate and his magic monocle, and open levelling à la Skyrim that allows freeform XP investment in anything from lockpicking to pyromancy.*

### SAINTS ROW: ENTER THE DOMINATRIX

*Volition is doing an Undead Nightmare with this standalone expansion. SR3 was insanity incarnate, and this tale of reality-turned-illusion and customisable superpowers looks to outdo it. Think Neo's reality-bending skills from The Matrix but with liberal nudity.*

**THE BIG QUESTION**

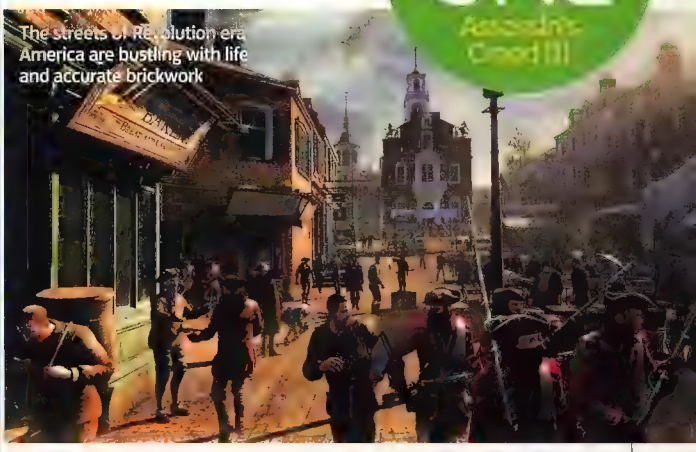
**Q** How many areas or cities are there in this Assassin's Creed?

**A** You'll visit Boston and New York, and hunt in the wilds of New York state

SCAN IT!

First gameplay trailer
goo.gl/KhaPL

DAY ONE
Assassin's Creed III



The streets of Revolution era America are bustling with life and accurate brickwork

**DETAILS**

**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / Ubisoft
**Developer** / Ubisoft Montreal
**Release** / 31 October

**A*ssassin's Creed* has always placed an extraordinary emphasis on setting, and despite confounding hopes of cavorting around feudal Japan or Victorian England, Ubisoft's 18th century American frontier, set to the backdrop of revolution and along the fringes of deadly wilds, looks the perfect direction.**

It's all here: famous figures such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Charles Lee, historical events like the Boston Tea Party and New York's Great Fire, epic weapons of the era including muskets, bows and tomahawks, a sleuth-'em-up multiplayer and fights ranging from local fisticuffs to all out war.

But what makes this a proper sequel, unlike iterative instalments *Brotherhood* and *Revelations*, are its changes. Fighting is more teeth-grittingly visceral, overhauled with thousands of new animations, double-counters, duel-wielding and, of course, two rather sharp hidden blades.

There's also brand new conspiracies to unravel. Where before, platforming-heavy Assassin's Tombs rewarded those who ventured off the beaten path, now those 2012-phobic Mayans supply the ancient temples and burial grounds. Devastating weapons and attractive armour is the bounty rife for pillaging, and freerunning your way to them promises a different experience altogether – the latest trailer shows sliding, leapfrogging, and seamless transitions between exterior and interior locations. Oh, and it shows Connor snagging the rifle off a redcoat, shooting him with it, then skewering another attacker with the bayonet.

The timeline ends this year (in this story, 2012 is the end of the world) but not before bowing out with more bangs than a fire in a gunpowder store. If it isn't already blindingly obvious, *Assassin's Creed III* will be a must-have. ■

May 2012

### MEN IN BLACK: ALIEN CRISIS

*This game will actually be out by the time you read this, but – tellingly – no review code arrived in our offices before release. Expect tepid third-person blasting, two-player co-op, and split-screen multiplayer based on a franchise most stopped caring about in 1997.*

Feb 2013

### BIOSHOCK INFINITE

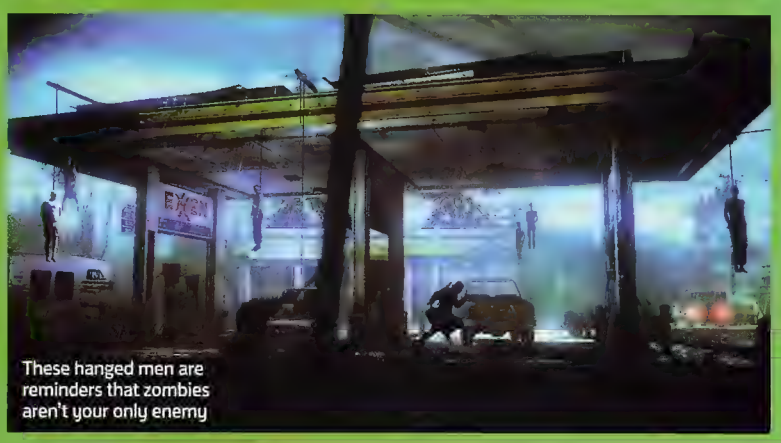
*Sad news. BioShock has been pushed back to Feb 2013, with Irrational's head man Ken Levine saying "We've uncovered opportunities to make Infinite into something even more extraordinary". Net rumours suggest this is multiplayer? Us? We just think they don't want to compete with Black Ops 2 in Nov.*

LATEST INFO

# DEADLIGHT

## *The end of the world looks good on XBLA*

There's a genuine sense of isolation in this game's devastated world



These hanged men are reminders that zombies aren't your only enemy

**DETAILS**

**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / Microsoft Studios
**Developer** / Tequila Works
**Release** / Summer

There's one key trick up *Deadlight*'s tattered sleeve: this apocalyptic 2D platformer doesn't *look* like a 2D game, and it certainly doesn't skimp on the realism. Most 2D games, wary of their dissimilarity to real and slightly more protruding life, play up the fanciful. *Limbo* casts realistic physics in stripped-down silhouettes, and *Shadow Complex* spins a heightened fantasy of underground bases and kickass agents. *Deadlight* combines the conspiracy and supernatural, mixing in more than a little of *Fallout 3*'s ravaged America for good measure.

This XBLA download looks like a cross section of a big-budget release. In a bleakly beautiful trek through an ashen US post-zombie outbreak, developer Tequila Works' cinematic aspirations are clear – in the way mouldy billboard adverts flutter limply in the breeze, in how shadowy forms flit across background scenery, in how the camera stares down highways that stretch miles to the horizon. Despite zombie holocaust exaggeration, this is a grounded story – just one man trying to stay alive.

It's still a platformer, however, and it plays like one, with ledge-grabs, sprinting, crate-pushing and switch-pressing all standard. It's hardly *Mario*, however, lacking the fluidity of dedicated platformers or the creative spark of more cerebral ones like *Braid*, with environments informed more by real life than the devious brain of a game designer.

### UNDEAD ATMOSPHERE

Combat against zombies too is hit and miss, with less jumping on heads and more dirty, gut-led improvisation. You can knock power supplies or rickety cars off hoists to squash packs of the undead below, taunt with Ⓨ to bait them towards electrified currents and barbed wire, and scavenge weapons. Early on you'll find an axe (push groups away with Ⓨ, hold the button down for a powerful swing). Corpses break apart bloodily: Tequila Works are certainly not opposed to a little of the red stuff, even if the physics are slightly exaggerated. It's not yet clear if weapons degrade over time, but if all else fails you've got a perfectly good boot on you.

But platforming conventions aren't what you'll come to *Deadlight* for. It's all about the atmosphere and setting, the interplay between foreground and back. Small touches, like background zombies clawing at boarded-up windows, or a figure in the foreground writhing in the smashed-out windshield of a burning car, give the illusion of a fully 3D world, while diaries and newspaper shreds flesh out the outbreak's mysterious source as you play: "February 21, 1986. The Soviet Union in orbit..." Overplayed platforming aside, the darkly heavy *Deadlight* is going to be one of XBLA's brightest beacons.

This is our hero. Guess there aren't many razors in the zombie apocalypse

SCAN IT!
'Save Yourself' trailer
goo.gl/PldCh

Speedy zombies draw comparisons with *Left 4 Dead* (*Left 4 Deadlight*)

Deadlight steals from *Limbo* and *Shadow Complex*. Smart move

## INFO BURST

### JOYRIDE TURBO

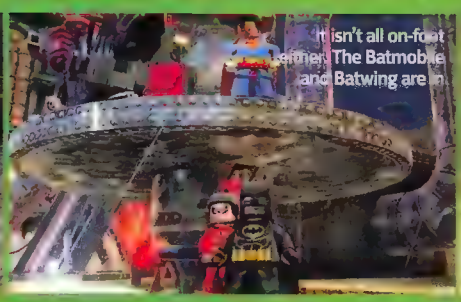
*The original Kinect Joy Ride was heavily criticized for the looseness of its motion controls, which Joy Ride Turbo aims to remedy by returning to classic controller-based inputs. A new Stunt Park is also being added, allowing players to jump off cliffs and fired out of a cannon while hunting collectibles.*

### DRAGON BALL Z KINECT

*This Kinect-powered series detour plays out entirely in first person, comes with a checklist of over 100 different moves, and sees you storming into epic battles while following onscreen prompts. Ramping up the gimmicks, there'll be scannable QR codes available, allowing you to unlock new playable fighters.*

The cast is much larger in this sequel. Superman, Wonder Woman and Green Lantern are new

SCAN IT!
Screens and trailer
goo.gl/ay1e6



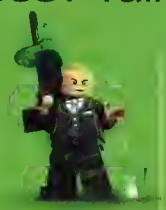
It isn't all on-foot either. The Batmobile and Batwing are in

NEW SCREENS

# LEGO BATMAN 2

## *Flying heroes? Talking? The Lego formula finally changes*

**DETAILS**
**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / Warner Bros
**Developer** / TT Games
**Release** / 22 June



TT Games have done so little to change their Lego formula over the years, that it's practically become a genre by itself; comedy mime action-adventure with well-loved characters. So it's strange that *Lego Batman 2* should depart so dramatically from that formula. That's right, Batman, Robin and all the rest will finally be talkers. TT couldn't confirm actors at this stage, but there are sure to be big-names.

Apart from that big turnaround, the next big twist is the advent of the game's giant, open world sandbox; a miniature Gotham City, complete with drivable cars and famous landmarks like Arkham Asylum, Wayne Manor and Wayne Tower, all chock full of collectibles.

This area has been designed specifically for the final big reveal; there are flying characters, including the indestructible Superman, who comes with his trademark laser eyes and powerful freeze breath.

Not that Batman and Robin have been left out. They have access to yet more suits to play around with – Batman's given an electricity suit that can drain or power objects, while Robin gets a Hazard Cannon. The increasing variety means that players will be able to use multiple heroes to progress at given checkpoints.

With Lex Luthor and Joker leading the villains into Gotham City, *Lego Batman 2* should be the best kid's game ever (and an embarrassing pleasure for grown ups, too). ■

DAY ONE
Game Of Thrones

*HANDS ON

# GAME OF THRONES

## *Based on the books, inspired by the show, surprisingly good*

This is new character Alester, using his Red Priest fire spells

As with the show, talking and diplomacy is an art. Expect back-stabbing

**DETAILS**

**Format** / Xbox 360
**Publisher** / Focus Home Int.
**Developer** / Cyanide Studio
**Release** / Summer

**Back in 2009, French studio Cyanide secured the rights to the "A Song Of Ice And Fire" books by George R. R. Martin, meaning, when the TV series launched in 2011, the game was already well underway. So although the books are the main inspiration, cosmetic changes have been applied to match the visuals of the show, making key characters and locations instantly recognisable.**

Despite that, the story follows two all-new characters: Mors, a ranger of the Night's Watch, and Alester, a Red Priest who can summon fire spells. Both can be customised extensively by fine tuning their attributes, abilities and skills, while dialogue options have been streamlined from the traditional RPG model. Rather than offering obvious choices, conversations flow naturally with just the occasional pause to make important decisions. Cyanide are adamant every one of these decisions carries weight, causing the story to branch and play out differently, eventually leading to one of four distinct endings.

Combat feels like an action game with strategy elements. You can slow down time, switch between characters and queue up special attacks before watching them play out in real time. Attacks cost energy, so planning is needed to take enemies down.

Given the lowly pedigree of the developers, we expected a game well below the standard of the TV show. The reality is a surprisingly solid RPG that *could* do justice to the license. ■

You can pause time, cue up attacks, then unpause to let combat play out

SCAN IT!
Trailer and news
goo.gl/fhfDL

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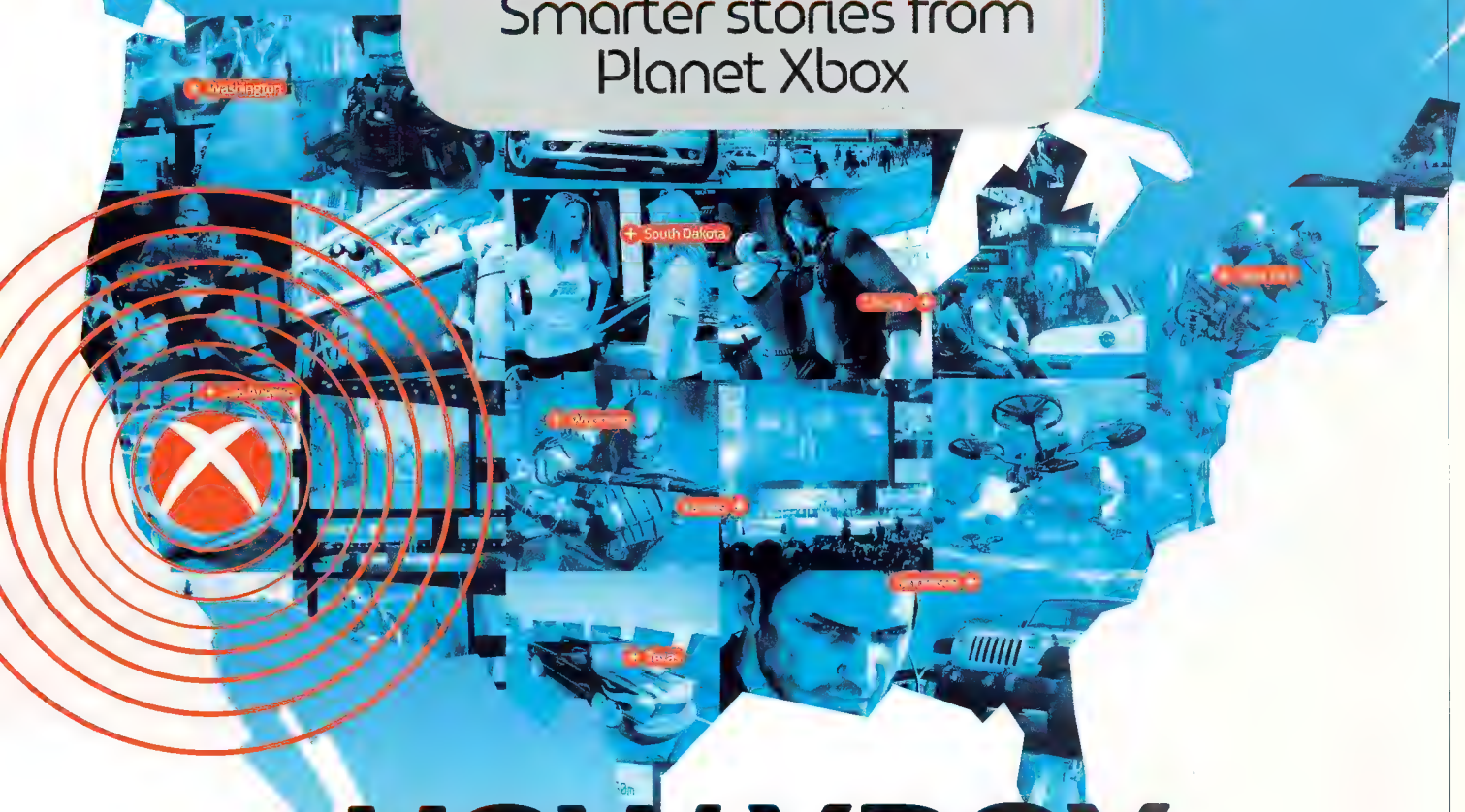



# HOW XBOX WILL WIN E3

## At E3 this year, Microsoft will introduce the last games of this generation – and hint at what's coming for Xbox 720

Every June, the games industry gathers in Los Angeles to lay out its plans for the next 12 months. We already know that predictions of new console announcements in 2012 are off: the 360 has one more year left to run. Instead, this is an E3 to see out the current generation. We'll get to see Xbox pushed to its absolute limit as Microsoft introduces the final 12 months' worth of 360 games – and what a 12 months it's likely to be.

When Microsoft take to the stage at 6pm GMT on 4 June, the first third of their show will be dedicated to third parties. Last year, they opened with *Modern Warfare 3*, *Mass Effect 3*, *Ghost Recon* and *Tomb Raider*. Expect a similar caliber of names to see in the presentation for 2012. Microsoft secured early access to *Call Of Duty*'s DLC back in 2007 and made sure every new *COD* would debut on their stage. This year, expect *Black Ops 2* to lead proceedings, followed by *Skyrim*'s timed-exclusive Dawnguard DLC, with Ubisoft's *Splinter Cell Retribution* capping a highly desirable trio.

Made by *Conviction*'s creative director Maxime Beland, *Retribution* is the first game from Ubisoft's new Toronto studio and just might be a 360 / PC exclusive. In a world where the third-party exclusive is almost dead, locking Sony and Nintendo out of a new *Splinter Cell* would be huge for Xbox. Sam Fisher is the 360's Solid Snake – sure, the *Splinter Cell* games have appeared on other platforms but Sam's home has always been Xbox.

## BIG E3 GAME ROUND UP

**What do the big players like EA, Activision and Konami have planned?**

Activision will demo an in-game level from *COD: Black Ops II*, plus more from Beenox's *Amazing Spider Man*, High Moon Studios' decent-looking third-person action game *Transformers Fall of Cybertron* (featuring the Dinobots), four-player online *James Bond 007 Legends* with links to forthcoming flick Skyfall, *Skylanders Giants*, and *Family Guy: Back To The Multiverse*. *Call Of Duty* on Vita is also possible, albeit debuted at Sony's conference. EA have a strong line-up with *MOH: Warfighter*, *FIFA 13*, *Dead Space 3* (rumoured to be a co-op shooter set on an ice planet), *Crysis 3* (expect first console footage), a new Criterion-developed *Need For Speed* building on the success of Autolog and online play, a *Battlefield* '3.5' expansion pack, plus potential news on AWOL action adventure *Overstrike* (from *Ratchet & Clank* devs Insomniac). Don't rule out another *Army Of Two*, or a *Dragon Age 3* announcement, either. Konami will have a playable *MG: Rising Revengeance* demo, and we expect Kojima to clarify his future projects (*Project Ogre/MGS5*, if not more). Don't be shocked to see a *Castlevania Lords Of Shadow* sequel, judging by the flurry of activity on producer Dave Cox's twitter feed, plus a revival of another *major* old-school franchise. *PES 2013* should be hands-on. Bethesda will demo in-game *Dishonored*, plus debut *Skyrim*'s Dawnguard DLC – most likely at Microsoft's E3 conference. Sadly, we're not expecting Shinji Mikami's new horror game *Zwei*, made by Tango Gameworks. Rockstar probably won't attend, though we expect *something* on *GTAV* around the show, most likely a new internet trailer with a release date. 2K will show near-complete *Spec Ops: The Line*, but *BioShock Infinite* is in hiding until its Feb 2013 release. Namco Bandai have *Star Trek*, *Ni No Kuni* and *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*. Capcom will have a big *Resident Evil 6* playable demo, plus more on *Lost Planet 3*, *DmC*, and a surprise announcement. THQ have more *WWE*, *Darksiders II*, *Metro Last Light*, and – maybe – first images of Guillermo Del Toro's *inSane*. Expect more on *Saint's Row The Third: Enter The Dominatrix*, a standalone expansion pack, where you're given super powers. Sega will lead on *Aliens Colonial Marines*, and possibly a new, non-*Bayonetta*, Platinum Games title.

# "THERE'S NO BIGGER EXCLUSIVE THAN HALO ON ANY CONSOLE AND MICROSOFT'S LIVE DEMO WILL BE ONE OF E3'S HIGHLIGHTS"

There's also likely to be a showing for *Resident Evil 6* among the third-party lineup. Capcom showed the first 10 minutes of Leon's campaign at their Captivate event in March, and there's plenty more where that came from. *Resident Evil 6*'s playable demo is another timed exclusive for Xbox and something the company will be keen to back.

## SERVICE CULTURE

After that flurry of gameplay, the bulk of Microsoft's show will probably be focused on services – Skype for 360, new media partners joining Netflix and iPlayer on the dashboard, tweaks to the Metro interface, and possibly a Kinect-powered version of Internet Explorer 9. Skype and IE9 have been in development for a while, while Metro is laden with advertising and is wildly unpopular with developers and users. Expect tweaks, but nothing more.

Around the midpoint of the presentation, Microsoft traditionally like to drop a surprise from their friends in PC land. Last year, it was *Minecraft*: the PC indie hit immediately became the fastest-selling Live Arcade game ever when it was released last month. This year, the PC games industry is running towards Free To Play. Games like *World Of Tanks*, *Dungeons And Dragons Online* and even Valve's *Team Fortress 2* are making more money through microtransactions than they ever could with an up-front asking price or subscription. Live's closed network can't support these titles at the moment because they connect to external servers – PS3's more open infrastructure is the only reason Sony were able to lock down an exclusive on *EVE* tie-in shooter *Dust 514* – but it's time for a change and Microsoft know it.

All the talk at March's Game Developers Conference was focused on Free To Play and the need for console manufacturers to catch up with PCs. When Microsoft commit to something they usually go big, and in F2P there's nothing bigger than *League Of Legends*. With over 30 million players, Riot Games' RTS makes *Call Of Duty* look wee. Cutting a deal with Riot or another major F2P player would be a major statement of intent towards F2P gaming.

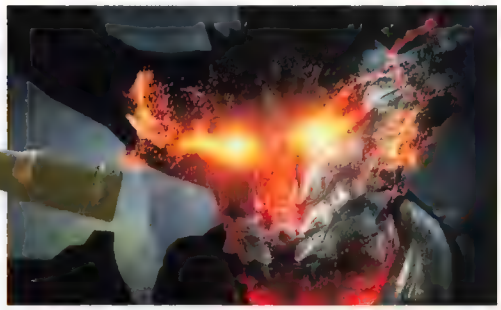
## FIRST PARTIES

The highlight, and likely show-closer, will be 343 Industries' public debut for *Halo 4*, but it's not the only major first-party game Microsoft will bring to the show. In development for almost two years at new British studio Playground Games, *Forza Horizon* is the first open-world *Forza* game and the first *Forza* made outside Turn 10 Studios.

This E3 will see the full public debut of 343 Industries' *Halo* game

Kinect title *Fable: The Journey* will be Microsoft's concession to motion controlled gaming. Try to look interested...

With a huge array of talent in the development team, *Forza Horizon* looks like one of the games to watch



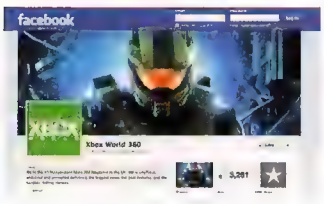
This is a screen from the very first demo of Unreal Engine 4. Expect to see the demo running at Microsoft's E3 conference

For the first time, Microsoft will stream its E3 presentation on Xbox Live

## WATCH E3 LIVE

### Join Xbox World in Los Angeles through Xbox Live

For the first time ever Microsoft will broadcast their E3 conference over Xbox Live, but if previous years' xbox.com broadcasts are any indication, you'll want some back up. Point your browser to one of the major American games sites or to xbox.com and run a second feed in case Live collapses under the stress. You can catch the show live at 6pm GMT on Monday, 4 June, and don't forget to hit facebook.com/xboxworld360, twitter.com/xboxworldmag, and search "Xbox World" on iTunes to get the team's first-hand feedback from the show.




Discuss the conference as it happens with XBW on Facebook

Playground's staff include regulars from Codie's *GRID* team, *Split/Second* developers Blackrock, Criterion, and Bizarre Creations. The pedigree alone makes *Horizon* one of the year's biggest games. *Fable: The Journey* is another major commitment for Microsoft, and one which seems crazier with every week that passes. The Kinect-exclusive *Fable* side-story feels like a huge risk – an ambitious title that could serve to expose Kinect's weaknesses.

Rare's focus is on the next generation so don't expect much from them. The Kinect presentation will go beyond *Fable*, with games like *Crimson Dragon* and *Dragon Ball Z*. You can go ahead and make a cup of tea during this bit, so long as you're back in time for *Halo 4*. We've already played 343's new *Halo* game and sat through a demo of the first level, but it's long overdue a full public showing. There's no bigger exclusive on any console and Microsoft's live demo will be one of E3's highlights, and (barring a big surprise) almost certainly the show's final act.

Don't expect new hardware at the show – that's a job for E3 2013 – but there may be teasers. Epic have worked closely with Microsoft on 360 and Kinect, and the *Gears Of War* developers already have next-generation Durango devkits. There's a slim chance Epic will demo *Fortnite* or People Can Fly's new *Gears Of War* prequels at the show, but more likely is the world's first public demo of Unreal 4. Shown behind closed doors to developers at GDC, Unreal 4 is Epic's successor to the engine that defined the generation. Epic are eager to demo it, but there's no console capable of running it. Microsoft's show-closer might just be a hint at the next generation – no dates, no specs, no hardware, just a taste of what's to come. ■

## THE GAMES INDEX

The news in numbers

**17**
*years E3 has been running – that's almost two decades*

**46,000**
*attendees expected for E3 2012*

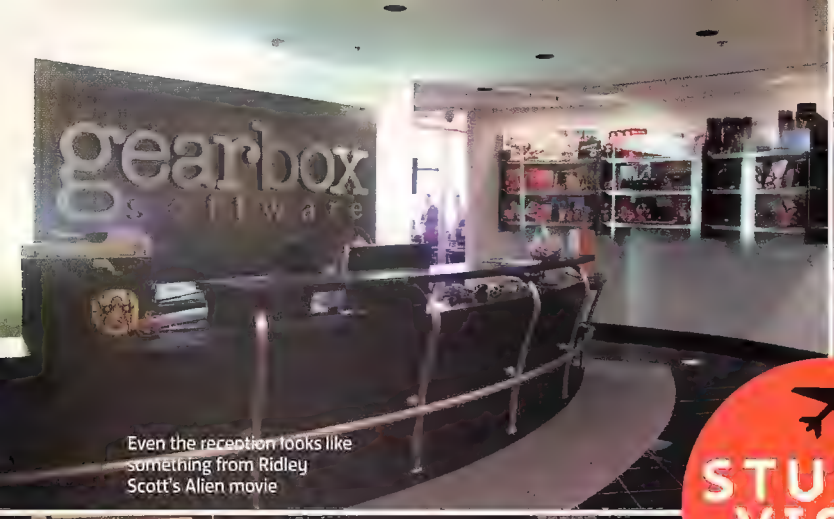
**5.7%**
*2K's stock decline after BioShock Infinite's delay*

**1.18 MILLION**
*copies of Dark Souls sold in the west – earning it a sequel*

**42,783**
*people knifed by Battlefield 3's most prolific stabber*

**£100,000**
*unpaid rent owed on Game's flagship Oxford Street store*

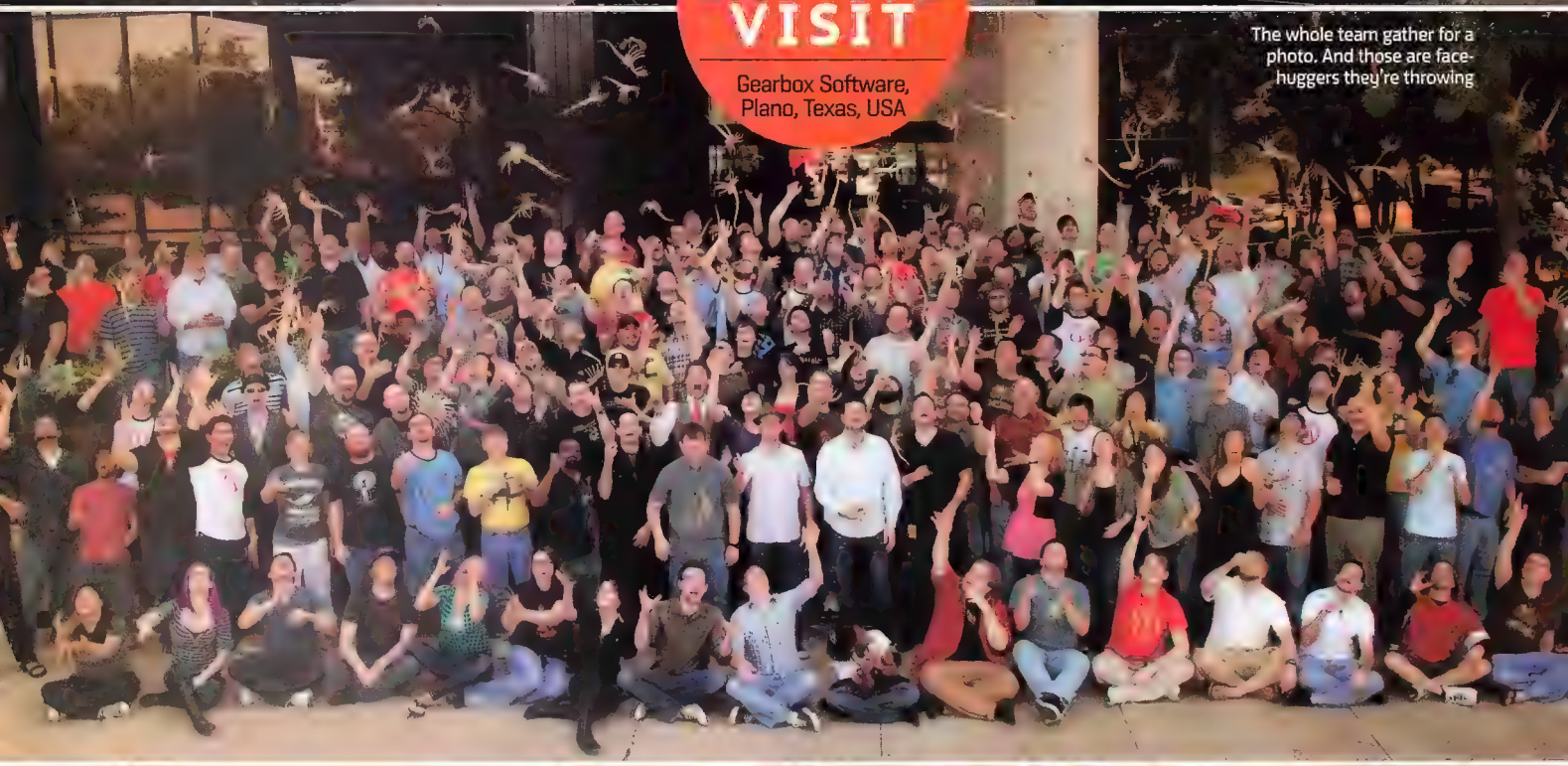
**01**
*number of testicles Hitler has in Sniper Elite V2*



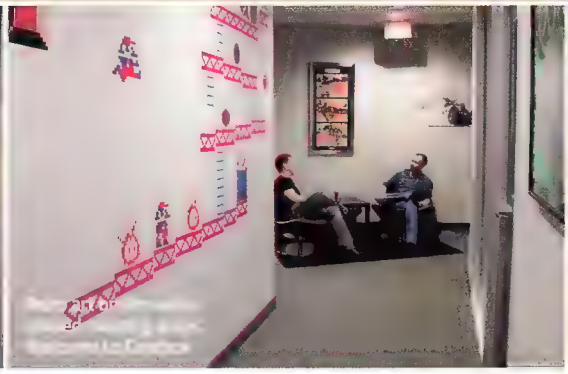

Even the reception looks like something from Ridley Scott's Alien movie

# STUDIO VISIT

Gearbox Software, Plano, Texas, USA



The whole team gather for a photo. And those are face-huggers they're throwing



## "EVERY DAY AT FIVE O'CLOCK IS WHAT WE CALL PLAY TIME"

Community Manager Chris Faylor on the future of Gearbox Software

**XBW Your offices are amazing! Why are you moving?**
This is a space that was originally built, then renovated by Gearbox. With a new building we have an opportunity to be influential with how it's created. We can have a mo-cap studio with 36-foot high ceilings if we wanted.

**XBW What's the new studio like?**
We have an opportunity to influence what other businesses are in that building. There have been surveys sent to the team to find out what the general consensus is. People want comic book stores and obviously game stores. Everybody's divided on what their favourite restaurant is, so we have 50 people campaigning for an In-N-Out Burger, 50 people campaigning for a Chipotle and five people going for Smoothie King.

**XBW You seem to have a lot of 'playrooms'...**
Every day at five o'clock is what we call play time. Employees can take an hour and just play games without repercussions. Some people boot up *DOTA* or *League Of Legends*. There's a group that plays *Smash Brothers*. We also have after hours leagues: softball, Dungeons & Dragons, bowling... They're trying to get a golf club started. So the focus is heavy on interacting with fellow employees. Even conversations you have in the hallways where you say, "Hey, I have a really great idea," can blossom into something amazing. That's how the *Borderlands* art style changed.

# ANOTHER GLORIOUS DAY IN THE CORPS

## XBW dons a ten-gallon hat and flies to Texas to explore Gearbox, home of Borderlands and Aliens: Colonial Marines

**A bunch of men stroll into a bank lobby with guns in their hands. It's time to call the cops, right? Not if you're in the City Of America bank in Plano, Texas. There, those guns are almost certainly replica Pulse Rifles from Aliens, and those men are pretty much guaranteed to be employees of Gearbox Software.**

When Gearbox Software was founded in 1999 it started life on the tenth floor. Later, it obtained the 12th. The developer would then acquire the floor in-between and the penthouse too, and shift operations upwards to accommodate a workforce now 200-odd members strong.

For now, the movement has stabilised (for all of a few months until Gearbox move 15 miles to the city of Frisco). *Aliens: Colonial Marines* is being created on the 11th floor while *Borderlands 2* lives on the 12th. The penthouse is home to the offices of the company founders and marketing teams. There's even a golden pneumatic lift that links the 12th and 13th floors. One that looks *a lot* like Duke's lift in *Duke Nukem Forever*...

It's hands-down the coolest office in existence. In the reception, Gearbox keeps some of its many trophies and copies of its products. And a life-sized Claptrap model from *Borderlands*. And life-sized cut-outs of the *Borderlands* protagonists. And the giant throne from *Duke Nukem Forever*.

It only gets better. On every floor there's a break room and a snack room stocked from floor to ceiling with crisps, confectionary and soft drinks. All free. Root beers, cream sodas, colas, Pop Tarts, M&M's, Kit-Kats...

Then there's the small matter of 'Pinball Alley' on floor 11, where you'll find six vintage, free-to-play pinball machines (Lord Of The Rings, Star Wars, Pinball Magic, Safe Cracker, Medieval Madness, and Indiana Jones) sitting next to a framed copy of Xbox World's *Duke Nukem Forever* cover and story from issue 98. Gearbox is immensely proud of its press coverage, and you'll find framed stories from different publications on every wall throughout the building.

Gearbox is working on both *Aliens* and *Borderlands 2* now

### PITCHFORD & PLANO

A motion-capture studio lives on floor 12, and a vault dedicated to Gearbox swag sits a few doors down. Did we mention the working hours? Our tour's taking place at 10.15am and the office is half-empty because it's '*too early for most people to be in yet*'.

But the best rooms belong to the founders. We saw two: Brian Martel's, in which you'll find a collection of rare memorabilia from the film, comic and gaming industries sitting alongside Lego knick-knacks, Space Hulk board games and facehugger plushies; and Randy Pitchford's, a veritable gaming museum in which two of the walls are lined with every console imaginable sitting on metal pedestals. Pitchford always comes across as a man endlessly enthusiastic about games: this is physical proof of that.

***"THERE'S A GOLDEN PNEUMATIC LIFT THAT LINKS THE 12TH AND 13TH FLOORS... A LOT LIKE THE LIFT IN DUKE NUKEM FOREVER"***

We've joked in the past that Gearbox isn't a stranger to delays and the cynic in us can now understand why that might be so. Many devs talk about their love for videogames, but none have ever come as close to proving their devotion as Gearbox did when they let us in. ■

VERY LIKELY

### RINGING THE CHANGES

*War In The North* devs Snowblind appear to have been swallowed by *Gotham Impostors* devs Monolith to work on *The Hobbit* tie-in. Monolith's rumoured *Inception* game is now almost certainly a casualty of this merger and *Impostors'* failure.

### VISCERAL INTENTIONS

A UI designer at Visceral Montreal mentioned two games we know about and one we don't in his (now amended) CV. Jeremie Benhammou is working on *Army Of Two 3*, *Dead Space 3*, a third unannounced project and a salve for slapped wrists.

### REACH FOR THE SKYPE

Microsoft are recruiting a developer to bring Skype to Xbox, turning your TV into a videophone that'll connect to every iPhone, Android and PC on Earth. Why buy £5bn of Jetsons tech if you can't rub it in Sony's face?

### BATTLESHUNTED

Rip apart the *Operation Raccoon City* disc and you'll find placeholder loading screens for canned *Star Wars* sequel *Battlefront III*. Weird. The series is now rumoured to be with *Lost Planet 3* devs Spark Unlimited.

# The Rumour Matrix

## Spooning the honey of truth from a hive of lies

### CASTLEMANIA

*Lords Of Shadow* producer Dave Cox tweeted about spending his days "in the land of Dracul", setting the stage for a reveal of a new *Castlevania*. It's another Mercury Steam production and is due to be announced at E3.

### HARD SELL

The 360's dashboard is knee-deep in ads but MS bosses can't swim in money like Scrooge McDuck without *really* shafting gamers. A marketeer's CV reveals plans to "further monetise" Live around Christmas.

### EASY PREY

*Prey 2* may have been on hold since November, says a Shacknews report. Developers Human Head allegedly stopped work during negotiations with publishers Bethesda. Following a short-term, maybe bluff-calling, cancellation of the title, it's back on.

### LEAKY VALVE?

Valve have denied rumours of a *Half-Life 3* reveal at E3, saying, "We are not announcing anything. We're going to show stuff everyone knows about." That includes *Counter-Strike Global Offensive*, but not *Half-Life*. Or does it? No, it doesn't.

LESS LIKELY

# WEAPON OF CHOICE

## Portal's Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device

#12
In a series of 2,100,457

**MANUFACTURER** APERTURE SCIENCE
**MAGAZINE SIZE** INFINITE
**RANGE** INFINITE
**PRIMARY FIRE** BLUE AND ORANGE PORTALS
**SECONDARY FIRE** ZERO-POINT ENERGY FIELD MANIPULATOR
**NICKNAME** "PORTAL GUN"

Originally built in the 1950s and marketed as the Aperture Science Portable Quantum Tunnelling Device, the Portal Gun is a scientific wonder able to bridge any two points in the universe. While earlier designs necessitated a bulky backpack housing a nuclear reactor, the latest version of the Handheld Portal Device is powered by a miniature black hole and cooled with a small fan in the rear of the device. In the event of a failure, the black hole can be jump started with the careful insertion of two miniature German Model 24 Stielhandgranate grenades stored within the device's casing. Should the fan fail, *run*.

Yeah, you're having fun now, but wait until that monthly sub comes out of your account

# £60 XBOX IS A TEST FOR 720

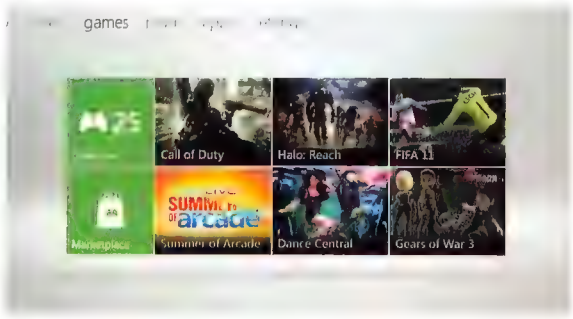
## Microsoft trials new way of buying Xboxes

**What's the worst thing about buying an Xbox? It's got to be the price. So over in the US, Microsoft is trying a new idea – selling consoles on contract like phones. Where once you'd have had to pay $299 for a 4GB Xbox 360 with Kinect, you can now buy one for just $99. The catch is you also have to sign up for two years of Xbox Live Gold.**

In theory, this sounds OK. In practice, things aren't so rosy. First of all, you can't pay the yearly rate for that time: it's the full $14.99 per month, which means two years of Live will cost (appropriately enough) $360. There's also a nasty termination penalty that starts at $250, and kicks in both for non-payment and being banned from Live.

### CHANGING THE RULES

At $99 vs $199 for a basic Xbox 360, it's not a great deal, and it's no surprise that Microsoft is keeping it small-scale: not only is it limited to US only, but also to its handful of retail stores. This isn't really about the current generation though, but about the Xbox 360's successor.



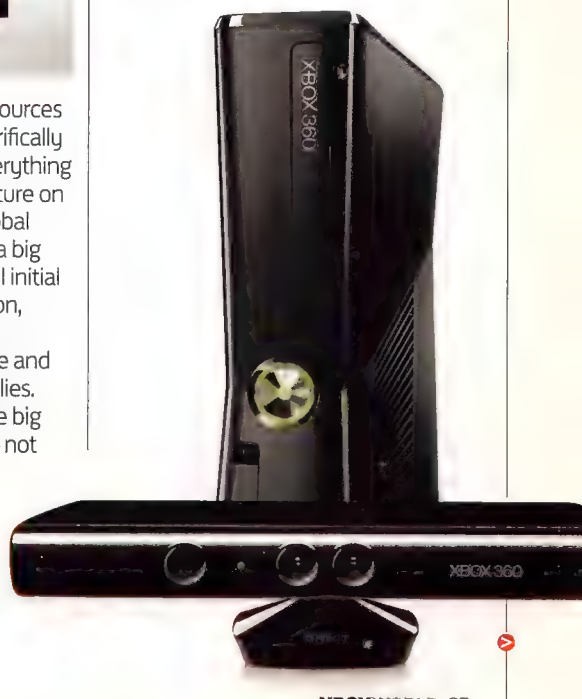

Tying gamers into a Live subscription makes good business sense for Microsoft

Codenamed Durango, our sources describe the next Xbox as a terrifically powerful and expensive do-everything machine (read more in our feature on page 60). In the middle of a global slump, a £299-£399 console is a big ask for consumers. With a small initial price and a monthly subscription, Microsoft can make Durango's up-front cost more manageable and put more boxes under more tellies.

Looking at phones, there are big problems with this approach — not least that the expectation of subsidies can quickly inflate hardware prices. Compare the iPhone and iPod Touch. Earlier models were almost identical, save the iPhone being twice the price because everyone was expected to get one on contract instead of buying outright. Take that assumption, add the termination clause of Damocles, and contract gaming gets risky.

Still, if Microsoft's test results in a choice between an up-front £99 or £399 for the next Xbox, it could be worth it if there's no other way you can afford one. Just be aware that the odds of being handed a *cheaper* deal are somewhere between zero and nothing, and saving up the old-fashioned way is the only way you'll actually own what you buy upfront. ■

*"A SMALL INITIAL PRICE AND A MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION CAN MAKE UP-FRONT THE COST MORE MANAGEABLE"*



# The Xbox World

## THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM PLANET EARTH

### DRAGON AGE DELAYED

*Dragon Age III* could be delayed even before it's been announced. Most of Bioware's *Dragon Age* team were seconded to Star Wars' MMO The Old Republic, which explains why EA warned that a 'key game' will be delayed till 2013. *DA III* was mentioned at the Penny Arcade Expo by a BioWare team who promised to respond to complaints about *Dragon Age II*.

### PREDATORS ON LIVE

The Metro angered Microsoft by claiming 'Xbox Paedophile Predators' are able to find 'prey' in under two minutes on Live. When Microsoft challenged Kingston University's study into online grooming they discovered the results had been misinterpreted by the tabloid. "Our comments were directed towards social networking sites," explained author Julia Davidson.

### RETURN TO THE ROW

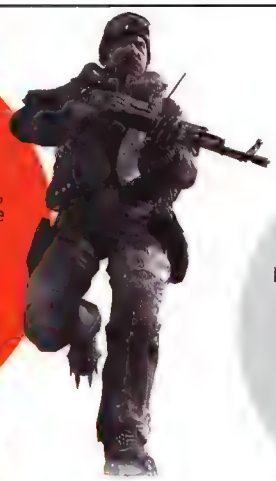
Volition are throwing the Third Street Saints up against an alien invasion inside a virtual world with *Saints Row The Third*'s full-sized expansion. *Enter The Dominatrix* will ship on its own disc for just 20 quid later this summer, and will trap the Saints in a Matrix-style simulation of Steelport.

### ASSASSIN'S UNDER ATTACK

A sci-fi author could kill *Assassin's Creed* if courts find Ubisoft guilty of stealing his ideas. John Beiswenger is claiming £3.5 million in damages and a halt to "further infringement" over similarities with his 2002 novel, Link, in which a device lets the protagonist relive his ancestors' lives.

## WAR TAKES TOLL

*Battlefield* developers DICE are taking on *Call Of Duty Elite* with the Battlefield Premium service. Along with the usual Battlelog treats, Battlefield Premium will offer exclusive DLC, dog tags, camo options, and all-new Assignments. Premium will get a pricetag at E3 in June, but with the official DICE servers shut down and players already paying for the dedicated servers they play on, will they be willing to cough up again?



## EINS, ZWEI, AIEEE!

Shinji Mikami will give *Resident Evil 4* the sequel it deserves with his new horror game, *Zwei*. Currently in production at his new studio and published by Bethesda, *Zwei* is the *Resident Evil* and *Vanquish* creator's most personal project in years. "I've found my focus and I'm striving for pure survival horror," he said. "I am being very hands-on." Find out more next month in our exclusive interview.

## NO TRADE-IN

Crytek's creative director Rasmus Hojengaard welcomes a next gen without used games. It's rumoured that the next Xbox will tie games to your account, PC-style, preventing the resale of used games. "It's weird that [secondhand] is still allowed. It doesn't work like that in any other software industries," he told us, joining *Witcher* devs CD Projekt in the anti-resale bloc.

*"REGARDING ART, WE'RE ALREADY GETTING A VERY GOOD ATMOSPHERE. THERE ARE STILL MOUNTAINS OF INADEQUATE AREAS, THOUGH"*

Shinji Mikami on his new horror game, Zwei

## The INSIDER

Tales from behind the gaming lines

Looks like *The Witcher 2* developers CD Projekt are working on two new games. One is an RPG, almost certain to be **THE WITCHER 3**, while their second project is rumoured to be a shooter. Both are likely to hit next-gen. Speaking of which, **ALAN WAKE** devs Remedy are also recruiting for a 'future console' project. Our bet is that they're working on both *Alan Wake 2* and new IP. And *Total War* developer Creative Assembly? Yes, they're working on a new **ALIENS** game as part of Sega's publishing deal with Fox. Will it be a strategy title? Quite possibly, and one which we're likely to see on Xbox using Kinect. Not to be left behind, **UBISOFT MASSIVE** are also recruiting for a next-gen project. Right now, they're working on both *Far Cry 3* and *Assassin's Creed 3*. Back to the current generation, Amazon listings point towards **LEGO LORD OF THE RINGS** coming by the end of the year. We're expecting the new Hobbit film in December, so the timing seems perfect for some Tolkein Lego. We also hear a game based on popular US TV hit **SONS OF ANARCHY** is in development. Hopefully, it'll buck the trend of terrible TV-based games like The Shield and CSI. Other nibbles? We hear **INTERNET EXPLORER** is coming to Xbox, and will be fully compatible with Kinect. We also hear that **SERIOUS SAM 3** is still in development at Croteam, and that the new **SOUTH PARK RPG** will be called The Stick Of Truth. Oh, and finally, word has it Harmonix are working on a **NEW MUSIC GAME**.

# The Score Clinic

How we, you and the critics rated last month's big game

## This month Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

### WHAT WE SAID

EDITED HIGHLIGHTS OF THE XBW REVIEW

**STEVE HASKE**
**XBW 114**

*"There's no question these games are still worth playing, even if the selection is incomplete. There's something to be said for stealth that still makes you tense up when making a mad, if calculated, dash across open ground. In those uncertain seconds lie everything good about Metal Gear Solid."*

9.0

### WHAT CRITICS SAID

CRITICAL OPINION IN A COLUMN

10
**1UP**
"While price should by no means be the deciding factor, with *MGSHD* it's impossible to ignore. This single disc will keep you highly entertained for several staycations."

9.0
**GAMESRADAR**
"Great value, even if you only plan to play one of the three games. A bunch of fun extras just cements this as the best multi-game compilation since 2007's *Orange Box*."

9.0
**GAME INFORMER**
"The fight against the Boss, Colonel Campbell going nuts, the haunting tune as Chrysalis flies by – these events are just as awesome as you remember."

9.0
**OFFICIAL XBOX**
"While the years haven't been too kind to their spruced-up SD assets, the chance to fully experience the MGS saga is one Xbox 360 owners definitely shouldn't pass up."

9.0
**DESTRUCTOID**
"*MGS3* single-handedly justifies the asking price. The fact that it comes with the still-engrossing *Sons Of Liberty* and an extraneous *Peace Walker* is pure gravy."

8.0
**GAMEREACTOR**
"Sure, the first game is nowhere to be found. But this is still a great collection though and shows that Kojima's classics stand the test of time."

### WHAT YOU SAID

XBW READERS GIVE THEIR VERDICT

9.4

**BEN ROBINSON**
"*Peace Walker* by itself would be worth full price, but it also includes the average *MGS2* and the awesome *MGS3*. This collection is the Boss."

9.1

**RYAN CLAYTON**
"Full of amazing detail and cool ideas, *MGSHD* trumps even the top action games of today. Just get used to the bonkers controls and you'll have a blast!"

9.0

**JIM KEY**
"Great collection, though I'm not a fan of *Peace Walker*. *Metal Gear Solid 2* is a lot better than peeps give it credit for! *Metal Gear Solid 3* is sheer unquestionable class."

9.0

**MILES DEWEY**
"A refreshing break from stealth / military releases. Hours of engaging action, humour and cinematic plot. *Peace Walker* is surprisingly fantastic online."

9.0

**JOHN GILBERT**
"A great introduction to the series for those who've never played a *Metal Gear Solid* game. Kojima Productions' HD remake has really benefited the series."

8.9

**KENNETH WARD**
"Despite the age of *MGS* there is nothing better than three-in-one and *Snake Eater* pleases my sixth sense. Hours can be put into the game without noticing."

**TOTAL CRITICS REVIEWS**
19 positive
0 mixed
0 negative

**TOTAL READER REVIEWS**
14 positive
1 mixed
0 negative

Total number of positive, mixed, and negative critic and reader reviews

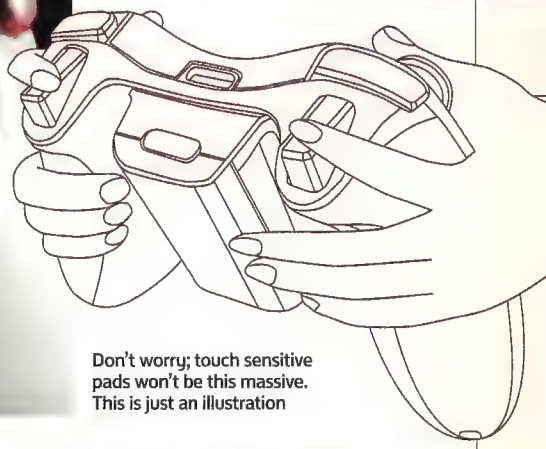
### IN CONCLUSION...

*Metal Gear Solid HD Collection* is still a frequent topic of discussion on Xbox World's Facebook group a few months after its release, and you can see why. *Metal Gear Solid 2* has aged worse than Jason Lee but even so, you're still getting three massive games for the price of one and there's so much good gaming in *MGS3* and *Peace Walker* that it's only a matter of time before someone starves to death while playing them.

### NEXT MONTH

Give us your reviews of *Max Payne 3*, Rockstar's crime noir opus. 45 word review, plus a decent pic of yourself. Have your say at facebook.com/xboxworld.

New tech could mean it's not only about the buttons you press, but the way you hold the controller



Don't worry; touch sensitive pads won't be this massive. This is just an illustration

# TOUCH SENSITIVE PADS ON WAY?

## Microsoft's latest patent points towards pressure sensitive controls

**The next generation will be won with patents, and Microsoft are ahead of the game with Kinect, new audio technology, and now a pressure-sensitive Xbox controller.**

Listed among the dozens of patents Microsoft files every month, the new pad would identify your unique "pressure profile" and unlock your console only when it recognises your hands at the controls. With a pressure-sensitive controller, your own hands would become the 'keys' to your system, working like Kinect's face recognition (only good, hopefully).

The patent lists zero gaming applications but there are infinite possibilities for the tech. At the most complex end, a pressure-sensitive controller could add extra invisible buttons to the pad; at the simplest, the game could automatically pause whenever you put the pad aside.

*"THERE ARE INFINITE GAMING POSSIBILITIES FOR THE TECH"*

Both Microsoft and Sony are building massively powerful next-generation machines but Microsoft's research and development into wearable controllers, touch-sensitive devices, and Kinect-style motion sensing tech means you'll see the future on your Xbox first. ■

*"THERE'S A CHANCE THE HALO MOVIE WILL BECOME A REALITY"*

# HALO GOES LIVE IN NEW ONLINE SERIES

## Could a Master Chief movie be next?

**Microsoft lost their chance to make a *Halo* movie with Universal and Fox, but their new *Halo* webseries proves they might be able to go it alone.**

Halo: Forward Unto Dawn is a *Halo 4* prequel following a Spartan IV aboard the UNSC Infinity – a testbed for humanity's latest forerunner-derived technology and the setting for *Halo 4*'s multiplayer mode. A full live action TV show, in the style of Neill Blomkamp's *Halo 3* shorts and Rupert Sanders' *Reach* commercials, Forward Unto Dawn is five weekly episodes of 15 minutes each. That's an hour and 15 minutes of big-budget TV – just a quarter of an hour short of a full feature-length movie.

Forward Unto Dawn is "the largest investment" Microsoft has ever made in live action, according to movie mag

Variety, and the full cast will be revealed at July's San Diego Comic-Con. You can read the inside story of the *Halo* movie's collapse in next month's Xbox World, but far from being the end of all our hopes, it looks like for the first time in years there's a chance the *Halo* movie might become a reality. If Microsoft's online experiment is a success, there's a chance that the software company might just ignore the big studios and go it alone. ■

# The XBW Twitterati

## Tweets from top devs, gobby hacks and you

**Eric Osborne**
*@urkmcgurk*
Community manager, Bungie
"Our employee handbook is basically: there are snacks in the kitchen, showers by the restrooms, and shouting on your birthday. #suckitvalve"

**Jonathan Jacques-Belletête** *@jonatchoo*
Art director, Eidos Montreal
"Prometheus seems quite promising as a movie. But I gotta admit, I really don't like a lot of the visual design choices I'm seeing in there."

**Ron Gilbert**
*@grumpygamer*
*Monkey Island* creator
"Just cut a puzzle involving a parrot, a coconut, a dog and a geyser. It was a stupid puzzle. We shall never speak of it again."

**Stephen Totilo**
*@stephentotilo*
Editor-in-chief, Kotaku
"*Black Ops II* is really *Call Of Duty 9* or, if you count more liberally, *Call Of Duty 20*."

**Mark Rein**
*@MarkRein*
Vice president, Epic Games
"Computer games were never 'analog' so it always feels odd to me when video game industry people talk about 'going digital'."

**Hideo Kojima**
*@hideo_kojima_en*
Boss, Kojima Productions
"The older I get, the weaker my body I get. I've been training at gym but getting harder yr by yr. I'm losing my weight but the fat won't go away."

**Zach Mumbach**
*@zachulon*
Producer, Visceral Games
"When I play a series like *Mass Effect*, where all my choices have impact, I don't care about the 'best ending' – I just care about my ending."

**Adrian Chmielarz**
*@adrianchm*
Creative director, People Can Fly
"If you think games need more 'strong female characters' then you're clueless. Only thing that matters is: DO THEY FIT THE STORY?"

**Meagan Marie**
*@meaganmarie*
Community manager, Crystal Dynamics
"Cleaning all weekend and watching list of movies I've never seen: Jaws, True Lies, Predator, Total Recall, and Tremors."

**Stephen Toulouse**
*@stepto*
Former Xbox Live policy director
"Dear women, as a male married for 15 years here's the deal: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and by the way [REDACTED]. And that's why I'm wrong."

**Markus Persson**
*@notch*
Minecraft creator
"If pirating *Minecraft* helps ensure the bastards don't censor the net, pirate it all you want."

**Billy Buskell**
*@ehlien*
Associate producer, *Mass Effect 3*
"We've announced #*ME3* Extended Cut. We are not speaking about specifics yet. Still replying to me with jabs about ending? You'll get blocked."

XBW SAYS

## XBOX 720 SHOULD ACT LIKE A PHONE

**Microsoft need to learn from the way the iPhone has dominated the mobile market and follow suit**

**OK, LET'S GET THIS STRAIGHT.** We don't think the next Xbox should actually *be* a phone. That would be crazy. However, we do think it should be sold and developed like a phone. Why? Apple have done a great job of making their expensive tech (iPhone, 3G iPad) accessible by offering it on contract – small monthly payments that pay for the device over the period of a couple of years.

Microsoft are already trying this out with the Xbox 360. **In the US, you can get a console plus a two year subscription to XBL Gold for $99. The catch? You pay $15 per month for two years.**

While we don't see this as tremendous value for a seven-year-old console, we do see enormous potential for offering the next Xbox at similar prices. This would mean that, **instead of forking out £500 for a console on day one, you could walk into a shop, hand over £100 and get a state-of-the-art machine.** And a monthly contract. It makes the tech accessible.

It also means **Microsoft could make a new model of the Xbox every couple of years,** upgrading their tech to keep pace with competitors. Imagine getting a fresh console every two or three years with new functions and backwards compatibility.

Microsoft would also be able to bundle deals with the service, like free subs to LoveFilm or Sky Sports. **It all hangs on whether they can get the pricing right.** Sure, some will sign up for £40-50 per month contracts to get a new iPhone, but will everyone pay the same to own an Xbox 720? Would you?

***"YOU COULD WALK INTO A SHOP, HAND OVER £100 AND GET A STATE-OF-THE-ART MACHINE"***

# »INCOMING

All the info you need on upcoming game releases

## READERS' MOST WANTED

Vote now on facebook – search 'XboxWorld360'

1 **GTA V**
With socially integrated gangs and a massive map, this looks to be a stunning reminder of Rockstar's prodigious talent.
***Out TBC***

2 **HALO 4**
Master Chief and Cortana reunite in this epic space opera.
***Out Christmas 2012***

3 **ASSASSIN'S CREED III**
Get all stabby in the American Revolution.
***Out 31 October***

4 **RESIDENT EVIL 6**
Stealth and action make this the best of both *Resi* worlds.
***Out 2 October***

5 **BIOSHOCK INFINITE**
Heaven up there with Elizabeth and Booker.
***Out February 2013***

6 **HITMAN ABSOLUTION**
Brilliant stealth with action aspirations.
***Out 20 November***

7 **BLACK OPS II**
This future-*COD* leaves modern military shooters in the dust.
***Out 13 November***

8 **TOMB RAIDER**
Back to basics with bows and bone splints in Lara Croft's revival.
***Out TBC 2013***

9 **LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW**
Cheerleaders and chainsaws via Suda51.
***Out 15 June***

10 **BORDERLANDS 2**
Shoot and loot in Gearbox's best invention since *Brothers in Arms*.
***Out 21 September***

## OUT SOON ON XBOX 360

Top games to buy soon

1 **INVERSION**
***Out 8 June***
This gravity-shifting shooter should shift few copies.

2 **STEEL BATTALION HEAVY ARMOR**
***Out 22 June***
Kinect's most promising game combines motion with pad.

3 **SPEC OPS THE LINE**
***Out 29 June***
Dear *The Line*, with your third-person action and sandy Dubai setting, come out already.

4 **JET SET RADIO**
***Out summer 2012***
The best-looking last-gen game to get HDed won't put us off by licensing only half the tracks.

## OUT SOON ON MARKETPLACE

The freshest downloads

1 **COUNTER-STRIKE: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE**
***Out summer 2012***
There is no tighter shooter than Valve's *Counter-Strike* series.

2 **DEADLIGHT**
***Out summer 2012***
Sidescrolling zombie survive-'em-up in a dystopian 1980s, and entirely exclusive to 360.

3 **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER**
***Out autumn 2012***
The best bits of the best Tony Hawk games in spanking HD.

4 **HYBRID**
***Out summer 2012***
This ultra-mobile third-person shooter has you jetpacking to ceiling-based cover.

## ZUNE'S BEST MOVIES

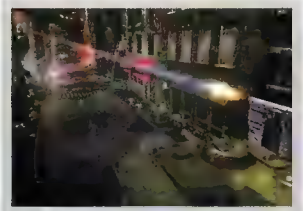
Top Watch Now films

1 **BLUE VALENTINE**
***Out now***
Golden Globe-winning sex and sadness for Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams.

2 **REAL STEEL**
***Out now***
Hugh Jackman as a surprisingly plausible robot boxer.

3 **MIDNIGHT IN PARIS**
***Out now***
Owen Wilson channels Woody Allen in the Jazz Age in this time-skipping froth.

4 **THE HELP**
***Out now***
Black maids take on racism in this civil-rights era drama with Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer.



## PRE-ORDER INCENTIVES

The best bonus content

1 **STEEL BATTALION: HEAVY ARMOUR**
Depending on who you pre-order with, a speed, power or defensive armour set is yours.

2 **DARKSIDERS II**
Pre-order from Gamestation for the Death Rides pack, which features two areas: Maker's Realm and Dead Plains.

3 **CRYSIS 3**
Stalker, Overkill and Predator packs reward preorderers with early access to devastating multiplayer weaponry

4 **BORDERLANDS 2**
Gearbox Gunpack boosts loot-finding and includes special golden guns.

© Davi Russo/ The Weinstein Company

## OFF THE RADAR

Four secret games we know you'll love

### CRIMSON DRAGON

Dust off your Kinect for this spiritual sequel to the Xbox's gorgeous rail-shooter *Panzer Dragoon Orta*. Because who doesn't want to ride a dragon into co-op battle?

### THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

With *Arkham City*-style room-clearing, this is less Spider-Man and more copycat. And just to be clear, that's a very good thing.

### KILLER IS DEAD

*Lollipop Chainsaw* is barely done and Grasshopper go blabbing about *Killer Is Dead*. Confusingly, it's not a sequel to *Killer7*, but it will probably be every bit as strange.

### XCOM ENEMY UNKNOWN

The *XCOM* first-person shooter has been making waves, but don't overlook this smart isometric strategy from the same universe.

[ THE XBW INTERVIEW ]

**AT A GLANCE**

Before joining EA Canada to produce *FIFA*, Rutter was in charge of Beautiful Game Studio's *Championship Manager* series.

Rutter insists *FIFA 13* will be the best, most unpredictable entry yet

# DAVID RUTTER

## FIFA 13's producer tackles your questions about how EA's series aims to stay on top

**1 *FIFA 12* was perhaps the best football simulation ever made, but some of our readers have said it wasn't as fun as past titles. How would you respond?**

I think it's a brilliant game. I've probably put more hours into *FIFA 12* than any of the previous ones based purely on the fact I've really enjoyed it.

I think by fun, or indeed a lack of it, then maybe it could become somewhat predictable where you could tell what the outcome would be in certain situations. In *FIFA 13*, when we talk about that battle for possession – and freedom of creativity in attack combining to create this unpredictable game – that will hopefully help your readers with the fun issues they were having in *12*.

**2 What are the big challenges when crafting team AI? How can you make it more realistic and error prone?**

For us, what we wanted to do was create moments that were not random – that's the wrong word – more like where the outcomes weren't necessarily the ones that you were expecting. We're trying to humanise our AI and create an unpredictable predictability, if you can get your head around that concept.

The tweaked defending and the ability to muscle past players, combined with your AI team-mates who are now making exciting, useful attacking runs off the ball; the new Complete Dribbling, First Touch Control, and even the work we're doing in our new tactical free kicks this year; all of these things go together to create memorable, exciting moments – but at the same time are wrapped up in a very authentic manner that feels true to real football.

*"WE'RE TRYING TO CREATE AN UNPREDICTABLE PREDICTABILITY"*

Having that as the foundation that everything else is built on is the key part to making things more realistic. Maybe it won't be as exciting this season. *FIFA 09* and *10* were very exciting... sometimes for all the wrong reasons. And I think your readers were right when they said *FIFA 12* was the best simulation of football we've done – it's certainly my proudest moment so far. I think *FIFA 13* is going to take the best of all the past titles and put their features together.

**3 *FIFA 12*'s Tactical Defending was quite polarising last year. How did you react to some of the negative feedback?**

It's an interesting one. When we first started talking about it people were like: 'oh my god, what are you doing?' Thankfully, we all loved it and persisted with it. I think it's a lot more engaging when you actually have to think about what you're doing in defence, which is exactly the outcome we wanted.

*FIFA* was always an attacking game, but before, when you were defending all you did was just hold a button. There's not really any skill or fun in that. Introducing a system that made you think was the right move. When we looked at the telemetry from our game and who's using Tactical Defending over the old system we found 93% of our players use the new system, while only 7% are using the old Legacy system. I think that speaks for itself. If we got 93% of people to like what we did every time I'd be over the moon. I'm pretty pleased with Tactical Defending and the way it changed the game.

**4 Do you think First Touch Control has the potential to have as big an impact on the *FIFA* series as 360° dribbling had in *FIFA 10*?**

I've been asked before that, if last year was a revolution, then is *FIFA 13* an evolution? Looking at our three major features last season (Precision Dribbling, Tactical Defending and the Player Impact Engine) they all fundamentally changed matches.

First Touch Control is Tactical Defending's equal when it comes to changing the game. Now you have to think about the way you are receiving the ball. You have to think about how you are passing the ball. It's a very big change. ■

# Gaming and TV are more amazing when you are the controller.

## Get Xbox LIVE Gold today!

Play, pause and rewind HD movies and TV shows with your voice or a wave of your hand.

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# » THE KNOWLEDGE

Destroy friends with your grasp of Xbox miscellany...

The new women's police uniforms haven't gone down quite so well with the more mature officers, mind...

## COSPLAY CORNER

THIS MONTH Kelly Jean as Poison from Street Fighter X Tekken

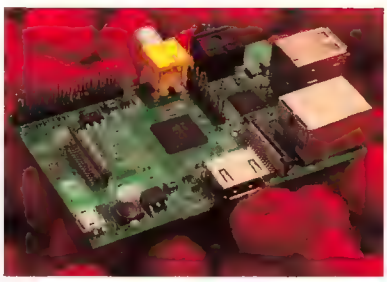
British cosplayer Kelly Jean went to America and spent the day having convention-goers sing Bel Biv DeVoe's Poison at her, which demonstrates her patience as much as it does the accuracy of the costume. "The outfit itself is pretty comfortable," she says. "I use my own hair, so no itchy wigs or anything!" Comfortable in LA, sure, but try wearing it to a summertime UK convention in the middle of a blizzard. "Also, a male Poison cosplayer came up and asked for my photo with him. Despite the fact I had got changed, he still recognised my distinctive hat."

© Leonard Lee

## MEANWHILE, OVER IN JAPAN

Suda Casts Lollipop

Karate champion Mayu Kawamoto was cast as Japan's face of Lollipop Chainsaw, proving the games industry is blind to race so long as you can kick a man's head clean off his shoulders.



## KILLER KIT

This month: the world's smallest PC

And they say Britain doesn't make anything any more. The Raspberry Pi is a credit card-sized PC able to run Linux and any basic program you throw at it, and it'll even handle Quake 3 at a decent framerate. Designed to put a cheap PC in every classroom, now you can own one too.

**£25, soon from online shops**

## XBOX WORLD LOVES...

Gabe Newell

Valve's boss joined Microsoft as a Harvard drop-out, but left with enough money to develop Half-Life and make himself the 854th richest man in the world. We'd go mental and buy Michael Jackson's funfair, but Newell spends his billionaire time collecting edged weapons, responding to just about every email he receives, and running a company that gives smart people complete autonomy to be brilliant.

## THE NANO INTERVIEW

Mark Lamia, Treyarch's Studio Head

**XBW** So, will Black Ops 2 play like the original game?
**Lamia** Players can have pretty different experiences playing Black Ops 2 in a way they've never had with any CoD game. There are many different different narratives and the choices that you make will affect all of them.
**XBW** Hot dang!

## ESSENTIAL MOBILE GAME OF THE MONTH

Pandemic 2.5 (iOS, £0.69)

*Pandemic 2.5* is about nothing less than the extinction of the entire human race – only this time you're in charge of the extinction, not trying to stop it. A cheery little number, then. You'll design a custom virus and unleash it on the world, capitalise on natural disasters, and reprogram the virus to beat doctors' countermeasures. You'll begin with an innocuous little cough, and watch it spread over borders by way of airports and shipping; soon you'll add a nice dose of diarrhoea to the symptoms. By the time it's gone global it'll be a kidney-failing killer, and grimmer than the ending to Requiem for a Dream. *Pandemic*'s an old internet favourite dating back to 2008, and is playable right now for free at kongregate.com. But your iPhone is the perfect place to plot the downfall of humanity. Let's just hope you don't have any loneliness issues...

## CULTURE NEWS

Microsoft big up the old red, white and blue in time for the Olympics. Sigh

Britain is crap at most things, but our nation leads the world in design and videogaming. Microsoft have merged the two in a Brit-branded abomination so hideous that looking at it for any length of time brings on the same eyeball-melting symptoms as the Ark of the Covenant. It's prettier in plain white without the flag stickers, and comes with a white Kinect and controller. It's available right now for £249.99.

## DON'T QUOTE ME ON THAT

Oops, too late

"I can't wait for Call of Duty Black Ops II to come out!!!! The graphics look crazy!"
Celebrity lady **Kim Kardashian**. Really!

"I spent the whole of 2008 talking to publishers about Timesplitters 4. No one wants to do something quirky and different."
Former Free Radical Managing Director **Steve Ellis**

"Story can only ruin a game for people who care about story. Gears of War has literally the worst writing in games, but it doesn't seem to ruin it for people."
Dead Space story producer **Chuck Beaver** (yes) on Gears of War

HEROES NEVER DIE
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SPECTACULARLY REMASTERED CAMPAIGN IN HD & 3D | CAMPAIGN CO-OP OVER XBOX LIVE®
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# REPLIES

## *Your letters, emails, Tweets and threats*

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Daily updates, win free stuff, talk to the team: facebook/xboxworld360

**Twitter**
Follow @XboxWorldMag for immediate reaction to breaking Xbox news

**YouTube**
Bespoke videos, funny office out-takes, more: Search for 'xboxworld'

**Podcast**
Free bi-weekly chat on the big gaming issues: download via iTunes

**Blog**
Catch up with all the latest expert opinion: xbox-world.co.uk

**Email**
Mail us directly with your thought-dumps at xbw@futurenet.com

*Creed 3* will keep the stealth, says reader Brogan Young

*Assassin's Creed 3* has been on your mind this month. **Brogan Young** admits that, although the first trailers have dwelled too much on big-scale action, he's optimistic that the stealth elements will make up the bulk of the game. The *Mass Effect 3* ending has reared its ugly head again, and **Chris Wells** thinks that BioWare have done a poor job of ending their 100+ hour RPG.

ISSUE #118

Elsewhere, **Barry Crabbe** has been pleasantly surprised by *Fez*, and thinks more XBLA games should follow its bold, inventive lead. He's our Hero of the Month as a result. **Sam Jones** is horrified by how tough some Achievements are to get, and he wants to know how developers choose their virtual rewards.

On our **Facebook group** the debate has been varied and lively. **Rory Mullan** sticks up for the *Battlefield 3* single player campaign, **David Eves** reckons *N+* is one of the best games he's played, and **Stuart Leak** asks about the most bizarre game concepts that actually worked out.

### TRENDING TOPICS

- Assassin's Creed
- Fez
- Tough Achievements
- Olivia Wilde as Lara
- Hitman Absolution
- The Mass Effect 3 ending

### OVER ACHIEVER

How do developers decide what to turn into an Achievement in a game? After reading your feature in XBW 118, I couldn't believe that anyone would have enough time or patience to unlock any of those stupidly hard Achievements. Play through *Dark Souls* three times? Are you having a laugh. What is the point of putting such impossible Achievements in a game that no-one normal will ever unlock?

**Sam Jones, via email**

We agree, some Achievements are poorly planned (the World Champion in *GRAW* being a prime example, because you can only unlock it by topping the world-wide leaderboard), but many are included to either reward the true hardcore, or to push players towards playing in different ways. Unlock a tough

### LIKE!

Magic & madness from our Facebook fan page comments

Olivia Wilde stars as Lara Croft! For real?
*Shaikh Siddicky, Facebook*
***No, not for real, but she does star in our dream game/movie poster feature in issue 118.***

I haven't bought the mag in a while, and was wondering if any of you guys know anything about *Red Dead 2* or *Black Ops 2*.
*James Monteith, Facebook*
***Yes we do, James. Black Ops 2 is our cover feature. If you haven't bought the mag, though, you won't get to find out about it. Shame.***

*N+* is absolutely brilliant. Spent more hours on that than all the *Call of Duty* campaigns combined, I reckon.

Don't be fooled by *Fez*'s naïve visuals. It's a deep, complex and very modern puzzle game

## XBW HERO OF THE MONTH

### A TIP OF THE FEZ

We need more games like *Fez*. When I first saw the game I was a bit put off by the fact that it looks so retro; so simple. However, your review made me want to give it a try, so I downloaded it and started playing. Now it's one of my favourite XBLA games ever. Why? It's clever and deep, and it keeps you hooked with its unique gameplay mechanics. It's only an XBLA game, so it's really cheap, but I've played it longer than *Modern Warfare 3* and I spent £40 on that! It just shows that simple concepts don't necessarily mean shorter, less quality games. If your game is smart and compelling, it can be both cheaper to make and better value. Next to things like *Braid* and *Limbo*, *Fez* is a great example of what XBLA should be. **Barry Crabbe, via email**

**Couldn't agree more, Barry. Fez is deceptively deep, and it's just as much about code-breaking as it is level shifting. It's multi-layered and smart, both true hallmarks of the best downloadable games. Check out our XBLA feature on p70.**

HERO OF THE MONTH WINS A FREE GAME

**Write the month's best letter and you'll win a free game plucked from our vault of red hot new titles. The address to mail your letters to? It's xbw@futurenet.com**

'Cheevo, and you can wear it like a badge of honour... That's what the tough ones are for.

### COLOUR BLIND

I don't have a problem with gay relationships in games. I thought Cortez was a great character in *Mass Effect 3*, and a hell of a lot more interesting than Vega. Come to think of it, having visited literally dozens of *Mass Effect 3* forums, I have yet to see a single homophobic comment. Here's where I do have a problem.

I've finished *Mass Effect 1* and 2 four times each for a total of 350 plus hours with the same Shepard. Now I get to choose what colour light kills me. Casey Hudson spent six months prior to *Mass Effect 3*'s release assuring us that we could ignore the multiplayer and it would have 'no impact on the single player'. Well, I would call two unobtainable Achievements and my Shepard dying as 'having an impact', Casey.

I thought the ending was okay up to the three choices, the result of which, for me, is three different degrees of disappointment. That doesn't mean I think that they should change it too much. I would, however, like to see a free patch that allows me to achieve the 5000 readiness 'perfect ending' offline. Maybe tweak it so that the perfect ending leaves the mass effect relays intact and allows you to continue playing, finishing side missions or just chatting with your team/crew like you could in the first two games. This would also give BioWare the option of releasing post-ending DLC. A bunch of missions that let you just explore and enjoy the world of *Mass Effect* and doesn't have the fate of the universe hanging on your every decision. **Chris Wells, via email**

The end of *Mass Effect 3* has been such a hot topic for the past few months. You make some good points Chris, but we still think BioWare should be allowed to end their game however they see fit. And maybe there's more to it than meets the eye – have you seen

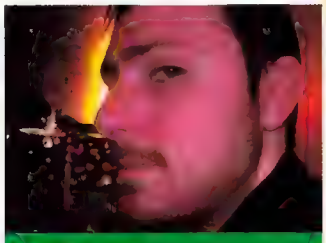
## LIKE!

Magic & madness from our Facebook fan page comments

*David Eves, Facebook*
***We agree, that's why it's part of our 20 great XBLA games feature this issue. Often the simple gaming concepts are the best.***
What's the most bizarre game concept you never thought would work, but actually did?

*Stuart Leak, Facebook*
***Multiplayer in Red Dead Redemption had no right to work, yet Rockstar turned it into one of the most unique online experiences of this generation. Also, the Spys vs Mercs multiplayer in Splinter Cell. Genius.***
Do NOT talk about the *Mass Effect 3* ending.

*James Cooke, Facebook*



## READER SPOTLIGHT

Dave Green, 29, Galway

**Currently playing**
*The Witcher 2* – immersive storyline and solid gameplay. Action RPG is my favourite genre.

**Most wanted Xbox game?**
Currently *Assassin's Creed 3*. New setting seems unique and intriguing, and I can't wait to see how the story-arc is wrapped up!

**Worst game ever bought?**
Bought *Enter The Matrix* purely on excitement for the new movies. It's a broken, barely playable mess, and an insult to gaming.

**Favourite game characters?**
Link from the *Zelda* series. For me he captures what gaming is about – excitement and a sense of pure adventure.

**Alternative name for Xbox 720?**
Wouldn't be surprised if it was just Xbox again. Can't sound worse than PS4, and 720 sounds daft.

the 'Indoctrination Theory' debate online? Either way, for more on our thoughts, check out the Xbox World STRONGcast 12 via iTunes, where the team discusses the ending.

### THE NEED FOR CREED

*Assassin's Creed 3* won't drop the stealth, but it will add more action elements. In some pictures of *AC3* you can see the hidden blade on Connor's left arm, so stealth will probably still be a part of the game. The reason the game looks more action heavy is because they are trying to make it more accessible – like in *Skyrim* when they dropped the Class system (sadly). *AC3* will give the player more choice in how they take out a mark, with an arrow to the knee or with a tomahawk to the back or a blade to the neck. If anything, they will drop the bomb making and the recruitment system. Also the new free running will allow you to make more fluid moves with the hidden blade, and a more varied kill cam. The action elements are also needed if you are going to fight 1000s of 'evil' Brits.

**Brogan Young, via email**

**LOL FREE ZONE**
You'll find plenty of laughs in XBW, but the use of 'lol' is banned. Unless we're, like, being *ironic*

Brogan, everything you say about the new *Assassin's Creed* is probably true. No, stealth won't drop completely from the series, and yes, things like bomb making and Brotherhood recruitment mini-games will be dropped. We'll reserve judgement until we've played it, but we do hanker for the days when *Assassin's Creed* was more about stealth and smarts than spectacle and elaborate deaths.

### KEEP IT SOLO

Am I the only one who just doesn't care about multiplayer in games? Like *Max Payne 3*. For me, *Max Payne* is all about a great, gritty story and shooting men in slow-motion. I don't care about gangs, XP and unlocking new hats.

Since when did every game suddenly have to have online in it? Even the ones that don't need it. I know that *CoD* and *Battlefield* have multiplayer – they always have, and I know that online stuff is part of the package with them. But *Dead Space 2*? *Max Payne*? *BioShock 2*? Why? In my opinion they should have spent the time making the story even better, and not wasted time and money on multiplayer modes that no-one will be playing in six months.

**Grant Henning, via email**

Grant, you're not alone in your opinions. Rich Cobbett – XBW writer – argues much the same thing in our Headshot feature on p82. However, he's more concerned about the hostile online communities and the sense of not feeling 'special' than the way developers allocate their budgets. For the most part, we agree with you: multiplayer should never be shoe-horned in. However, online modes can break new ground from the unlikeliest of games. Take *Splinter Cell* and *Assassin's Creed* for example. Both traditional solo games, both with brilliant multiplayer.

## READER ANALYSIS

What goes on in the minds of the XBW community

**TOP CLASS IN BATTLEFIELD 3?**
**34%** ASSAULT
**23%** RECON
**23%** ENGINEER
**20%** SUPPORT

**WHAT'S THE BEST ONLINE OF THIS GENERATION?**
BATTLEFIELD 3 – ***65***
GEARS OF WAR 3 – ***22***
COD4: MW – ***15***
AC BROTHERHOOD – ***11***
HALO 3 – ***10***
LEFT 4 DEAD – ***8***

**ARE MODERN GAMES TOO EXPENSIVE?**
**31** YES
**15** NO
**04** THEY'RE TOO CHEAP

**XBW READERS WHO WANT AN XBOX HANDHELD CONSOLE?**
12%

***"I'd like a patch that just gives me 5000 readiness for the end of Mass Effect 3"***

***Whoops. Too late. We talked about it on STRONGcast 12.***
Why was every body so hard on *Battlefield 3*'s campaign? I actually liked it. Quite a lot, in fact.
*Rory Mullan, Facebook*

***While Mike hated it, Andy quite liked the campaign, too. It's divisive, unlike the universally loved online.***
I'm not liking the trailers for *Hitman Conviction*. It looks like its gonna be a very simple game.

*Wes Activecamosick, Facebook*
***Yeah, we hate them too. But we love the trailers for Hitman Absolution.***
I will be honest – as much as I hate *CoD*, the new trailer looks badass.
*Ben King, Facebook*

***We agree.***
Just bought *Batman Arkham City* for £20 on Zavvi – bargain! I'm about five hours in and loving it :)
*Ashley Stuart Dengate, Facebook*
***And it only gets better...***

# HORSES ROB 20

The best selling FPS ever of player choice and freedom set to change the future of the

OTS ZOMBIES
25
leaves corridors behind in favour
– we reveal how Black Ops II is
Call of Duty series forever

**As the immortal words of 3LW tell us: haters gonna hate. And *Call Of Duty*, as the world's biggest game, is at the top of the pecking order when it comes to criticism. But while many decry the *COD* development process as being as linear as the levels themselves – a few more explosions here, a few more cast member deaths there – Treyarch, they of the even-numbered release dates, are doing everything they can to make such accusations redundant.**

Speculation suggested a future setting, and with the lion's share of *Black Ops II* taking place in 2025, speculation was bang on. Good old speculation. But far more surprising is that, for the first time in the series' history, this is going to be a non-linear *Call Of Duty* experience. Not quite as shocking as an all-synchronized-swimming *Grand Theft Auto* perhaps, but still a major step forward for the franchise. Players will be given choice in a number of ways, some more major that others. In the midst of levels certain gameplay decisions can be made – the demo we saw allowed for a group of bad dudes to be dealt with using either a high-powered sniper rifle or by rappelling down beneath an underpass and taking them on at closer range. But there are choices – and tests of skill – that will have far more wide ranging implications. Your actions during missions will determine whether you succeed or fail (certain levels can actually be 'lost', and will stay that way), how the game's wider conflict unfolds, even whether particular characters live or die. And while key cast members dying is nothing new for *Call Of Duty*, this time it's on you.

You can also avoid certain missions altogether, but in doing so you'll be missing out on another one of the game's big innovations: Strike Force. An entirely new mission type, this introduces yet another first for the series: sandbox gameplay. These missions take place during the events of the single-player campaign, but have a distinctly multiplayer flavour.

## WEAPON OF CHOICE

You choose which mission to undertake and which to forego based on briefing dossiers, but how they play out is left in your hands. As well as a squad of footsoldiers you're also supplied with several pieces of 2025 military tech, and can take direct control of any of these at any time with a tap of the D-pad. Tech such as the CLAW – Cognitive Land Assault Weapon – a hatchback-sized, four-legged warbot that comes topped with a hefty cannon. Or the assault sentry drones, which look like *COD*'s take on Daleks: that is to say they're armed with rifles and grenade launchers. Any of this can be used however you wish to complete the given objective, or you can just play armchair general and direct your underlings via the bird's-eye view 'overwatch' mode. Although the maps do look multiplayer reminiscent – and the mode itself looks ripe for co-op play in the future – right now Treyarch is committed to making this fit seamlessly within the main story mode. It's certainly a radical departure from what we're used to: watching a mission in action is a disorientating experience, with control shifting numerous times between the human squad members and the helpers with robo-brains. But being able to set waypoints, dictate flanking manoeuvres and personally drive in the heavy weapon support is a more tactical experience that's open to all kinds of experimentation and improvisation.

*Deus Ex*'s 2025 is black and gold. *COD*'s is burnt sienna. The future *is* orange

***"Your actions have implications... while key cast members dying is nothing new for Call Of Duty, this time, it's on you"***

Quadrotor drones are the airborne eyeballs of the future in *Black Ops*' 2025

### M8 MATE

**The prototype stikes again**

'The rifle of the future' makes perfect sense in the hands of a soldier in 2025 if not for one problem: the M8 doesn't exist. The prototypes overheated and were too heavy. The project was scrapped in 2005, but no one told the games devs – you'll find M8s in *Crysis*, *Ghost Recon*, and *Bad Company 2*.

## HACK ONCE AGAIN

These gameplay shake-ups are married to a more ambitious story, although at the heart of it is still a global conflict of blockbuster proportions. This time it's the USA and China who are enacting Cold

Skidoo? Done it. Quad? Done. Boat? Done. Horse? Horse!

War Mk. 2, caused in part by an escalating tension over rare earth elements. A real-world resource used in the creation of all kinds of technology, from laptop and phone batteries to guided missiles, these are becoming a bone of contention in actuality: President Obama recently spoke out about China (who control 95% of the world's supply) restricting exports of them, which fits in with the developer's overall focus on 'plausible authenticity'. And all of this tension is brought to boiling point by a new villain looking to cripple both superpowers involved in the dispute. Raul Menendez is his name, and Treyarch are promising the most three-dimensional bad guy *COD*'s ever had. Which admittedly wouldn't be difficult, but the entire narrative structure is being designed with that aim in mind: flashback missions set in the Cold War of the 1980s will introduce you to the character and allow you to learn his motivations and operations. That way, come the inevitable Hollywood showdown, it'll be more than just a faceless man with a foreign accent who

# What's Changed?

XBW's quick guide to *Black Ops II*

## Missions

### Non-linear

For the first time, the campaign mode won't be a straight sprint through a linear storyline. The game has a branching mission structure, most obviously illustrated by 'Strike Force' missions. These jobs are done on the side and can be replayed, affecting the game's central structure.

### Strike Force

In practice, these missions play like *Modern Warfare*'s spec op missions: players spawn in an open arena similar to a multiplayer map, and lay waste to the hordes of AI idiots sown within.

## Online

Treyarch are keeping schtum on specifics, but multiplayer game design lead David Vonderhaar has said they've been keen to 'kill sacred cows' in the franchise's online modes. Expect killstreaks and perks to get a serious talking to.

## Real-time strategy

During Strike Force missions, players can switch to 'Overwatch mode'. This is the viewpoint of a general sat far away from the conflict, and lets you direct your soldiers, robots, and drones.

## Zombies

### More players

Treyarch's undead-murdering mode is their most enduring contribution to *COD*. There are rumours you'll be able to play with another seven friends, doubling the number of playable characters.

### Multiplayer engine

This mode now runs on the multiplayer's engine.

## Enemies

### Mad terrorist

You'll be fighting another batshit supervillain, hacker supremo Raul Menendez, who's somehow nicked the keys to America's unmanned drone army and turned them against their creators.

## Longest timeframe

### Near future

*Black Ops II* covers *COD*'s longest timeframe yet, starting in the 1980s and finishing up in the near future of 2025. That's close enough to make the game feel relevant, but far enough forward to justify some of the madder technology on show.

# Blacks Ops opinion

## XBW's contributors on the COD revolution

### Mike Channell

"The thing that has me most excited is the way RPG-style devices are creeping into this traditionally meat-headed shooter. Branching storylines, moral choices, and nuanced endings make for a more involving experience than being told to care when the game decides my squadmate has to die. In an interactive medium, stories should be interactive too. That's why, regardless of new settings and sandbox-style missions, I'm more excited for *Black Ops II* than I've been for any *COD* before it."

### Joel Gregory

"While *Modern Warfare* games have been expanding the same formula since *COD 4*, Treyarch is the studio that's innovating the franchise. And things are set for a big shake up this time around. It's the non-linear aspects to the campaign that come as a shock. Allowing the player control over the outcome of missions, deaths, even the war itself, is a huge shift, and the focus on characterisation shows that effort is being focused where it's needed the most."

### Alex Dale

"To say the futuristic setting leaves me cold is the greatest understatement since Hitler's sister said it would probably have been better if he'd become an architect, but as thematically tired as it is, the 2025 tech opens up exciting new possibilities that threaten to shake *COD*'s multiplayer to its core. Those quadcopter whirly things are the perfect evolution of *Black Ops*' RC-XDs (is it just me, or were they the best thing about the first *Ops*), and the prospect of deploying one of those armoured tanks as a high-tier killstreak is a tantalising one. If you're on the opposing team, how do you combat *that*? If Treyarch's endgame is to make a commerically-viable *Armored Core* game, then I for one am all for it."

Tanks, drones, and other mechanised murderers take centre stage in 2025

you'll be trying to shoot/stab/throw off a cliff in slow-motion.

We also have – as you'd expect given the setting – a new hero, although one who's heavily linked to Treyarch's previous adventure. David Mason is his name and, as super sleuths among you will have realised, he shares more than just a gruff voice and penchant for headshots with *Black Ops* lead Alex Mason. (For anyone still struggling, 'Mason' is the key.) But it's not just the progeny of our former hero who provides character continuity: as the reveal trailer showed, (now) old man Woods is also back in the equation. Somehow surviving an intimate acquaintance with an enormous explosion in the last game, here he's the ghost of future war, warning of the dangers of an over-reliance on technology... just before exactly that comes and blows up the free world. Also the aforementioned '80s flashback missions – which will see you in varied locations such as Afghanistan, where you're aiding mujahideen against the Soviets – are going to be told through his eyes, the smart money suggesting that you'll be fighting as or alongside him throughout.

### EVERYTHING CHANGES

On the multiplayer front we're promised a back-to-basics approach, and the return of a bigger-than-ever zombies mode has already been announced – details are scarce for now but the fact that we've been told the current engine can handle both twice as many zombies and twice as many co-op players should excite, and already has us envisioning team modes and even more panicked screaming over the headsets. But the focus for now (in public, at least) is the sweeping changes made to the fundamental structure of the single-player campaign. And it certainly seems to be more than a developer simply making all the right noises. The scale of ambition gives this the feel of a watershed year for gaming's biggest series – don't bet against its now-premier dev doing it some serious justice.

The first of zombie's new characters gets a grindhouse-styled reveal

# Zombies!

## The living dead get a secret upgrade

**Treyarch's zombie mode was first included as a minor extra in *World At War*. Those zombies were Nazis – slow and shuffling, but still deadly in large numbers.** The mode's success ensured its existence in Treyarch's future *COD* titles, and the strong sales of *Black Ops*' Rezurrection DLC pack – which brought maps from earlier *COD*s under the *Black Ops* banner – means the devs are committed to making the mode the best it can be.

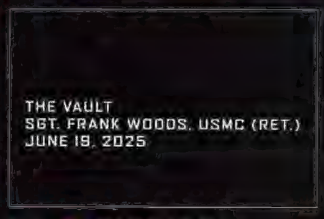
So they've doubled the player count, meaning you'll now have seven other still-alive humans watching your back against hordes of the undead. Treyarch are keeping their zombie cards close to their rotting chests, but there are a few other specifics we've discerned.

*Black Ops II*'s zombies mode now uses the game's multiplayer engine – rather than its single-player one – to run. On paper, it looks like a minor change, but this will bring the mode closer to the lightweight, faster feel of the competitive multiplayer – and that last time we checked, was quite popular with a few people. It'll also let Treyarch carry perks, killstreaks, or whatever else they've got up their sleeve for the game's multiplayer, into the co-op mode with minimal fuss

***"Zombie mode will be closer to the lightweight, faster feel of the competitive multiplayer"***

# 18 things you might in the first Black

## Taking a closer look at the not-so-hidden clues




### 01 FUTURE SHOCK

First thing: it's 2025. The farthest that any *Call Of Duty* – of any flavour – has gone into the future is *Modern Warfare 3*'s 2017. This is uncharted territory for the shooter.

### 02 SEE THE WOODS

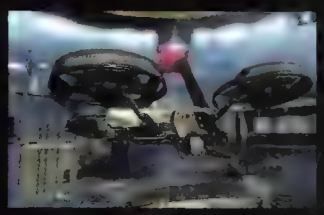
The trailer opens with a man. He sounds like he's smoked all the world's cigarettes, and he's Frank Woods – playable character and black ops operative from, fittingly, the first *Black Ops*.

### 03 MEDAL OF HONOUR

His wall has a case of medals. Turns out Frank's a fan of *Call Of Duty* multiplayer – those medals are the same as those awarded for reaching prestige ranks in the game's competitive modes.

### 04 SAVE THE DATE

Freezeframe after the Treyarch logo and do a CSI-style zoom in, and you'll see a set of dates. These range from 07.23.86 to 07.23.25 – all dates within the game's specified storyline.



### 07 DRONE ON

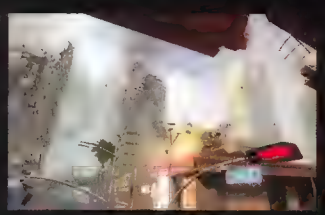
We know the game features unmanned drones, but note the scrawled 'Charlene' on this specimen. Chances are we'll be able to scrawl on our drones like we could our guns in *Black Ops*.

### 08 SHARP CLAW

This is the CLAW, the Cognitive Light Assault Weapon. It's one of the beefier unmanned vehicles we've seen so far in *Black Ops II*. Cognitive means it'll shoot you without someone telling it to.

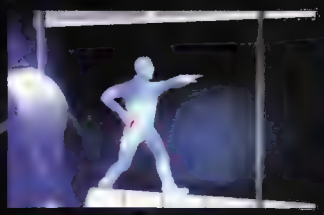
### 09 FALLOUT SHELTER

This is apparently a nuclear missile, and forms the backdrop for the first of three levels shown. Menendez's cyber-terrorism presumably has also snaffled him nuclear launch codes.



### 10 BATTLE: LA

The second level shown is downtown LA. It doesn't look too swanky, the West Coast having taken the brunt of the drone assault on the US. Much of California is burning.

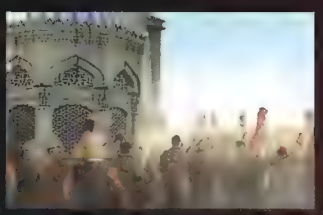


### 13 SECURITY BREACH

This looks like a futuristic vision of airport security, suggesting increased tension and paranoia. Understandable, really, given how mad terrorists can hijack entire armies.

### 14 JET STREAM

These fighters are FA38. Shortly afterwards, the trailer shows a new UAV. The first fighters are manned, the second isn't, suggesting man versus machine dogfights in the sky over LA.



### 15 EASTERN EYE

The third level shown is Socotra island, off the coast of Yemen in the pirate-infested Gulf of Aden. It's a holiday destination now, but looks to be the site of a popular uprising here.

### 16 PLAY ON

This is Harper. He's Mason's backup in the field. He's taking cover in what looks like the ruins of LA, suggesting Mason was on his way there during his previous scene.

# have missed Ops II trailer

## 05 BURNING AIRLINES

The hover aircraft first shown in the trailer looks like a private carrier: Shiran. That suggests the hovering drone technology in the game's quadcopters is now commonplace for the world.

## 06 CAPTURE THE FLAGS

Note the flags on the upper left as you look out the aircraft's cockpit window. They seem to be from a range of countries, indicating some kind of future-UN building.

## 11 GENERAL STRIKE

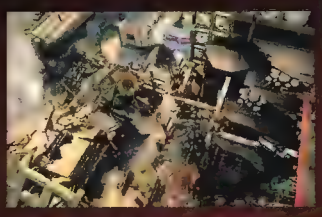
This is the first glimpse of a Strike Force mission. Players can take control of soldiers on the ground or in RTS-style Overwatch mode, or, as shown here, inhabit the machine soul of a drone.

## 12 FUTURE SOLDIER

The first human soldier shown in the trailer is David Mason. He's the son of *Black Ops*' Alex Mason – him who knew the numbers – and is kitted out in suitably futuristic gear.

## 17 RETRO CLASSIC

That's a Colt M4 carbine, and those people are paradropping, suggesting this section takes place during the 1980s, rather than the 2020s. So you're likely to be playing as Woods.



## 18 TAKE COMMAND

This is one of the game's Strike Force levels, seen from Commander view. From here, you can move troops and drones to clear a level of opponents like you would in a strategy game.

# *Multiplayer Rumours...*

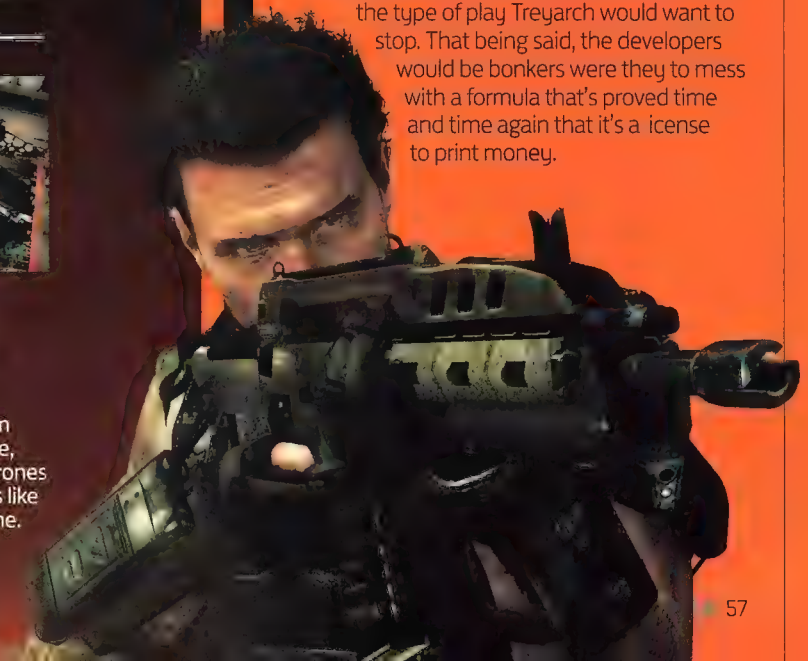
**X2** Activision's monster leak reveals the secrets behind *Black Ops II* online

*Black Ops II*'s multiplayer mode details were apparently leaked before the game was even announced, by retailer merchandising way back in April. Modes apparently include an escort game type that asks one team to guide a VIP past three flags; an asymmetrical 'split spawn' mode that hands one team a chopper and asks them to capture a central flag, and 'Equaliser', which switches dead players to the enemy team, making unbalanced play part of its mechanic.

The document excitedly confirms that the multiplayer mode has more weapons than any *COD* before it, including – brilliantly – a 'tactical hammer' that can smash through riot shields and robo-drones like they were cardboard.

We question the veracity of this information. Treyarch have promised they'll be taking their own tactical hammer to the multiplayer, and the document's details paint a mode very close to the series' existing archetypes. Indeed, some of the perks on display – such as 'diver' (the ability to shoot accurately while 'dolphin diving' to the ground) – seem to propagate exactly the type of play Treyarch would want to stop. That being said, the developers would be bonkers were they to mess with a formula that's proved time and time again that it's a license to print money.

> *"The devs would be mad to mess with a formula that's proved it's a license to print money"*



# THE NEXT GEN Console DEVELOPER'S manifesto

We've been waiting for news of Xbox 720. Now Microsoft have given it a codename: **Durango**. But what will it really be like? And more importantly, what do developers want from it?

# Power

## SOME DEVELOPERS CRAVE IT, OTHERS SEEM TO FEAR IT, BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS IT?

What do developers mean when they talk about "power"? Is it the machine's ability to think? To march ever larger armies up ever more complex terrain, before a camera exposed to ever more wondrous special effects? Or do they mean the simple power to build – to imagine? When DICE producer Patrick Liu talks about the power of next-gen consoles, he seems to imply the former. "As a developer you always want more," he tells us. "PC is very liberating to work with because it scales up very quickly." But not every game experiences such a direct benefit from spiralling brawn.

Power can corrupt, after all, or at the very least made things complicated. "The consoles are shifting a lot," cautions BioWare president Ray Muzyka. "When your tool pipeline and content creators have to learn new tools, it's harder to actually get to the big innovations and the artistic craft." In his eyes, the power to create is as much about stability. "We're reaching the point where it's less about the technological advancement and more about how you apply it from an artistic, emotional approach. It's nice when you can focus on the direction and enable player choice, and reward that choice with meaningful consequences that make players feel like they're part of a world that exists."

Over the next few pages, we're going to find out just what power the developers really want from Microsoft's next console; and – just as importantly – what power they could do without.

***Not every game experiences a direct benefit from spiralling brawn***

DICE's Patrick Liu is excited by the greater power, but for Ray Muzyka of BioWare it can be a distraction

**"It's a tricky question because you can say, 'Well if we had more power we could do something great with it.' *From Dust* used all of the power of today's console, all the processor at the full rate. But it's complex sometimes to program [for] console. I'd love to see very easy development, an improvement in the creation environment"**

Eric Chahi

**"It's interesting that no matter how much power you get from a system, it's never enough. Within minutes an artist can bring down even the most powerful new workstation just to see if he can do it. So yes, we'd love more of everything."**

Tore Blystad, IO Interactive

# Controllers & interfaces

## DESPITE WHAT YOU MAY HAVE HEARD, THE FUTURE OF CONTROL ISN'T JUST ABOUT KINECT

With the basic platforms frozen for the longest period in console history, this generation has seen considerable – and, from a marketing perspective, perhaps necessary – innovations in control. "Accessibility, user interface... the more we can make that seamless and easier, the wider the audience we can bring in. The power, depth and richness of games can be enhanced," says BioWare's Muzyka.

But is an innovation the same thing as a breakthrough? Sega veteran Toshihiro Nagoshi draws an important line between interface (simply, how we connect with our games) and a mere subset of that: hardware peripherals. "People don't look at the peripheral when making choices on which console to buy," he warns. "The console makers should stop relying on creating different peripherals and adding more features."

Jean-Marc Geffroy and Richard Lemarchand agree that increased raw power isn't the same as progress

"The most important and unavoidable thing about gaming is the interface. Right now that means either buttons or touchscreens. Those are the only two interfaces we have," he says, apparently unimpressed with the potential of motion-sensing devices such as Kinect. "Sure, we have voice input, but voice will never become the main interface, just a sub-input. I think the answer lies in some as yet unknown third type of interface."

Something hands-free, we ask? "No, I think hands will always be directly involved. That will never change. Something like gyroscopes is close, but gyros are hard to control. It needs to be something new that allows for totally accurate control. Once that is discovered, everything will change."

### MOVING FORWARD

Nagoshi may well be correct, but until that great leap forward, Microsoft and its console competitors will have to make do with this generation's gadgetry. Despite

being technically impressive, it's fair to say that motion control hasn't yet fully escaped the novelty tag. Games for motion control tend to feel more reduced than enriched; gamers, meanwhile, might feel cheated or (in the case of *Kinect Star Wars*) apoplectic.

Kinect is here to stay, but can it be more than a gimmick?

The physical controller is going n[illegible] on it in [illegible] port, gaming as a whole is damaged. But Kinect isn't going anywhere either, so what progress can we really expect from Xbox 720? Perhaps what's needed isn't ever greater sensitivity to motion control, but an increased understanding of feedback and player responses. Jean-Marc Geffroy is creative director at Ubisoft Paris, which just happens to be the studio behind Nintendo Wii launch title *Red Steel* and most recently *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*. He believes the next step for this gen's interfaces is to bring them all together, creating a system that's more than the sum of its parts.

"When you have a brand like Microsoft, you need to create a console. But we also need all the Facebook games, or the apps that you can create that put more meat on the experience," he says. "How we can use this convergence between media is one of the biggest objectives. Maybe it [involves] 3D, smartphones and the tablet. Multiplayer is part of that convergence. Maybe you can create better teams and communicate better."

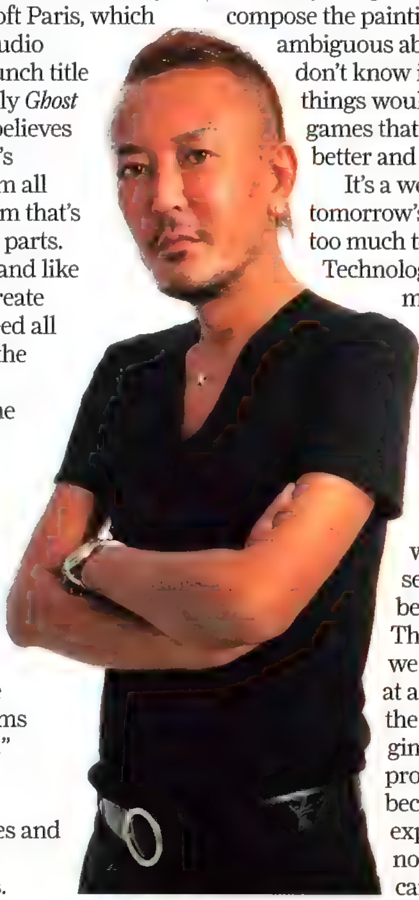
## LESS IS MORE?

For all this talk of features and options, though, there'll always be a call for focus.

***The next step is to bring the interfaces together, creating a system that's more than the sum of its parts***

The worst you can say about current-gen interfaces and peripherals – and it's a very real issue – is that they've diffused many ga[illegible] compare th[illegible] they're sh[illegible] than games on quite 'primitive' platforms. "There are always going to be constraints," says *Uncharted* veteran Richard Lemarchand, now a teacher at the University of Southern California. "But speaking as someone who likes to think about creativity and what makes it possible, constraints become your best friend when embarking on a creative endeavour. The things that you can use become a scaffolding to figure out exactly *what* to do. It's the shape of the blank piece of paper that lets you figure out how you're going to compose the painting." Like Muzyka, he's ambiguous about greater power: "I don't know if having all these things would lead us to make games that were really that much better and more creative."

It's a worrying prospect: tomorrow's consoles arriving with too much technology on board. Technology which drives up manufacturing costs that are then felt by both consumers and creators, prompting companies like Microsoft to jam new features into games and franchises that were doing just fine without them. We've seen it before, and we'll be sure to see it again. The question is whether we arrive sometime later at a natural split between the gesture-controlled gimmicks and the more progressive 'core' titles – because from previous experience, there's next to no evidence that the two can become one.



Nagoshi says "totally accurate controls" will be vital to the next gen consoles

# Networking

## WHY THE PROBLEMS WITH ONLINE ARE TOO BIG TO BE SOLVED BY GAMING ALONE

"We can't have players hold hands in our game – it's too hard right now," complains EA veteran and Tiny Speck designer Robin Hunicke. "It would be really nice if you could create that symbolic gesture with another human being over infinite distances. To walk under the stars with that player and to have the connection issues disappear; for the network to be so fast that you could experience a moment-to-moment connection." This couldn't be farther from the usual gripes about lag in shooters and player numbers ("It's down to network stuff, limitations on how much traffic they can have," says DICE's Liu). It speaks to the most important goal of new technology: to free the imagination.

The EU plans to have everyone in Europe broadband-ready by the end of next year, while the UK (perhaps optimistically) boasts of achieving that goal by Christmas – yet still it's not enough. Networking is about more than just the fatness of the ISP's pipe and the households it can reach – it's also about how telecoms companies manage demand. You've probably heard of "acceptable usage", and you may have encountered "traffic shaping" (the unadvertised throttling of connections to cut the ISP's

***Networking is about more than just the fatness of the ISP's pipe and the households it can reach***

### WHAT ABOUT AI?

"The big thing for us is that console manufacturers continue to give us flexibility," says Bethesda marketing VP Pete Hines. "There are far too many times where it's, 'Well, in this scene we only need this much of the graphics processing power, and it would be great to borrow some of that for the AI because we have a bunch more characters here, and we're doing a lot more cycles managing our AI.' Our programmers are always talking to the console manufacturers, so those conversations are going on." IO designer Blystad explains that "more CPU power would enable us to run even more complex AI on the characters and add more NPCs to the game". But complex how? For a game like *Hitman*,

Developers Robin Hunicke and Tom Galt are frustrated by the limitations imposed on gaming by the network

costs). "If it remains the same for the next generation then that would still be a limitation for [our] games," says Liu.

*Darkness II* designer Tom Galt is based at Digital Extremes in London, Ontario, where the main cable provider is Rogers Communications. He echoes these concerns: "They have a vested interest in not allowing you to download unlimited data, it's like a 50Gb a month limit. If that kind of stuff stays then there's no way we're going to get full games downloaded on a regular basis. You've got games that are shipping on three DVDs. You can't download that in an affordable way."

## LIFE IN THE CLOUD

Insomniac boss Ted Price raises another next-gen issue. His worry is "whether we will even be using client-based storage media in the future. What if everything exists on the cloud and you're streaming it to your consoles? Who knows?" This is where services like OnLive and Gaikai come in, with their terrific potential to simply stream inputs and live game feeds back and forth, effectively letting you play the most demanding games on the planet from cheap playback devices. For Durango, furthermore, that could mean more than just enjoying PC-quality visuals years after launch. You could, for example, get started on an MMO without ever downloading a client or patch. You could freeze a session on console and just pick right up again on PC or even handheld. But that's only realistic if a) your home has super-fast broadband, and b) you don't have to worry about crippling data usage policies.

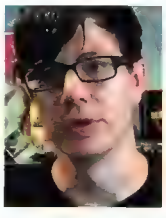
the perceived realism of AI is arguably critical. That goes for *Dishonored*, too, as designer Harvey Smith explains. "We wouldn't use [next-gen] power for graphics. Our AI is very different from most games." Again, it's not just about increasing power, but giving devs the freedom to use it.

# Memory

## BIG AND BEAUTIFUL GAME WORLDS MEAN NO HALF MEASURES WILL DO

The limits of Xbox's 512Mb RAM banks are now impossible to hide. With the average PC spec climbing into the 4-8Gb region, there's anxiety whether Durango's investment is enough. "More RAM is always welcome as streaming only gets us so far," says IO game director Tore Blystad. "Our assets are built in far higher quality than what a current-gen console can pull off, and we would love for all the little details of game worlds to get proper attention."

Liu confirms that RAM is "something we're always struggling with technically". He adds, "Something that comes up as a bottleneck very often is that we want to stream more textures, more sounds. Significantly more memory would help a lot."



Scott Kester (*Borderlands*) and Sefton Hill (*Arkham City*) want more RAM

## SIZE MATTERS

So how much is 'significantly'? "16Gb!" jokes CD Projekt quest designer Lukasz Szczepankowski (though he's not far off the mark for current top-end PCs). "Right now it's very difficult to optimise and make things fit. *The Witcher 2* was our first console game, so that in itself was difficult for us. But still, comparing it to PC at the beginning we thought, 'How the hell is this possible using 512Mb of RAM?'"

"It would be awesome to have more texture resolution," says *Borderlands 2* concept artist Scott Kester, "particularly in our game because it's all kind of hand drawn." Sefton Hill (of *Arkham City* developers Rocksteady) agrees: "We could always do with more RAM, for sure. We're always working to make sure we can fit the game in memory, so there's certainly no doubt about that."

# Development tools

## HOW THE WORKMEN OF GAMES WILL CRAFT THE NEXT GENERATION

Everything we've talked about so far – the horsepower, the interfaces, the connectivity – is academic, of course, if no one can actually use it. At the risk of sounding obvious, games are made by people, and people cost money. And if the games keep getting bigger and more complex, it'll take those people longer to get the job done. "We've almost hit that plateau where if it gets much more it's going to be impossible for us to make games in two year cycles," warns Digital Extremes' Tom Galt. This is why the biggest breakthroughs of next-gen (as in the tail end of this gen) might not have anything to do with hardware at all. "When it comes to graphics I think that new hardware is always going to provide more potential for stunning visuals, and that's great - as a tech geek I get really excited about that," says Insomniac's Ted Price. "However, when it comes to the game experience it's important to look at one's own internal process and try to get as much proficiency out of that to make better games."

"I don't think that these days it has as much to do with the hardware as it does with making time to iterate on your design. That has more to do with internal tools than anything else. What's always been challenging for us as a company is carving out enough time to both iterate and polish. We recently extended our development cycles to three years for

### WHAT THE DEVS THINK

**THE GUESSING GAME**

Speculation is nice and all, but a terrifying prospect for developers themselves. It's what sours their appetite for Orbis. "It's easy to say 'yes, we would love more power'," says Bethesda's Pete Hines. "There's a big 'but' in there: 'You are going to have to change the way you design for your consoles; now you have to relearn how we do everything on this console to get that new power. So, you are developing while they are developing. *Oblivion* and *Morrowind* were both in development for a platform that didn't exist yet. You're hitting a moving target that doesn't stop until a couple of months before launch."

**THE MOBILE INFANTRY**

"The market for game consoles will get smaller, and the main market will become portable games," predicts Sega's Toshihiro Nagoshi. We're beyond the console wars now. Whatever Microsoft comes out with next won't only be competing with PS4. Now, the whole console market is challenged by smartphones, tablets and home computers. Will the next gen be the last? "I don't think game consoles will disappear, but more and more people will use home PCs for gaming," says Nagoshi. "A long time in the future it'll just be PCs and mobile phones, [with] phones becoming just as powerful as consoles."

Ted Price says Insomniac have used new tools for *Overstrike* (right)

*Resistance* and *Ratchet*. and that's made a huge difference for us. For *Overstrike*, we've retooled our engine and internal tools."

## STATE OF THE ART

Development for Orbis could see fundamental changes in how art, in particular, is generated for its games. In a current-gen triple-A game the process can be relatively crude and expensive: for the game to appear bigger, you simply have to build bigger art. Bigger and more luscious worlds require vast, hand-drawn skyboxes wrapped around them. In them you have to put people and things which, for the game to be taken seriously, have to be variously modelled and textured. Lighting has to be designed and baked in, or designed and dynamically generated; whichever, it's an ongoing process for growing numbers of artists. "With game systems nowadays it takes a long time to create this next generation art with high quality models, normal mapping, shading and the lighting systems that we have," says Galt. "If we had procedural art and that kind of stuff, that would be awesome."

Procedural art? That could be many things. Sometimes it's used as an umbrella term that incorporates things like detail maps: high-quality smaller textures that are merged intelligently with larger ones, effectively recycling detail. A truer example would be the use of purely dynamic effects and simple 3D terrain to create the epic backdrops of *Alan Wake*, a game produced by a small team at Remedy. Or you could, like the game *Fuel*, create a formula that builds outdoor terrain, figuring out how different biotypes should naturally embroider roads and other features. Or, like download title *Hydrophobia*, you could have an editor that lets you bash together interiors in minutes rather than days.

The key, believes Lemarchand, is to spread as much of the power as possible to as many people as possible. "As a game designer who is an implementing game designer, who sticks together the art assets and the animations, and who does some scripting to hook up the interactivity of the game, I've always been very interested in tools for designers. Tools that are empowering and easy to use, but at the same time allow you to make changes to the tools when you need something new from them. That's the kind of stuff I'd be interested in pursuing."

***We have a new generation of consoles so the software must evolve too***

These tools, like the Durango hardware itself, need to become more open and aware of a market now split between numerous popular platforms, from iOS and Android devices to Vita, and even potentially internet-enabled TV. "Microsoft put a lot of effort [into *From Dust*] with the XBLA, and that was very cool," says Eric Chahi, who designed *From Dust* but is most famous as the creator of *Another World*. "I think next gen [will] have something more universal between all these platforms, something that simply makes game creation easier." He stresses that consoles are just the vehicle: "The hardware can help improve the software, but we have a new generation of consoles so the software must be as strong an evolution."

**THE WALL**

Frédérick Raynal, creator of the original *Alone In The Dark* and *Little Big Adventure*, makes an interesting point about diminishing returns. "There is an ultimate console," he believes. "There is always one limit, which is the human. Sounds, for instance: we did 8KHz sounds and it was, 'Ah, that's no good.' Then we did 44KHz and you cannot sense any more. Sounds are done, we cannot improve that. Then screens! Your eyes can't see the difference between two points on a Retina screen. Colours: players cannot see any more, so we reach another limit. The number of fingers you have!" That means tech has to be led by the user: "We need to ask gamers what they want. I don't believe you can do a new console that will federate all games within it."

**THE SINGLE-PLATFORM DREAM**

Multiplatform gaming spurs competition at the first and maybe second-party level, but has more than its share of downsides when it comes to making games. "More than anything, I'd like just one platform," says former Capcom luminary and now Tango Gameworks head Shinji Mikami. "Instead of using resources to make games for multiple platforms, we could use that money to make the game itself better. It would be like a PC, and each hardware maker – Sony, Nintendo and so on – could make their own interface. With video you can run the same DVD on any brand of DVD player, right?" Whether console developers will be so keen on cooperation after decades of competition is another thing...

# Xbox 720: the story so far

## MICROSOFT'S NEXT CONSOLE IS ALREADY WITH DEVELOPERS. THIS IS EVERYTHING WE KNOW ABOUT IT

The likely cancellation of Microsoft's next-gen hardware reveal at E3 puts an end to some rather nerve-jangling brinkmanship, but means little in the grand scheme of things. Durango is the code name for the next Xbox, and it's very real. Like PS4 it's aiming for a November 2013 release, we're told, and it's no secret that developers have it already. As we reported last month, devkits went out in March.

But now there's a new rumour courtesy of gaming site IGN: that Durango manufacture is underway at the Flextronics factory in Austin, Texas. The company, a longtime supplier of parts for both previous Xboxes, has "created a new testing group separate from the rest of the company. This team was solely dedicated to comprehensive marketing, software, and hardware tests of the next Xbox. With that activity concluded, Flextronics started building the hardware," claims the site. As IGN points out, though, it's more likely to be devkits that are rolling off the factory lines than retail units.

As suspected, the latest word from our sources is that Durango's "16 CPU cores" are actually logical cores, which would likely mean eight physical cores running two threads each. This brings its processing power into line with modern high-end PC specs, which might even have eclipsed it come Christmas next year. These words, for instance, are being typed on a machine with an Intel i7-980X CPU that's over a year old. It has six cores, which thanks to Intel's HyperThreading technology act as 12 logical cores.

Now consider that November of last year saw Advanced Micro Devices' "Bulldozer" technology deployed in its "Interlagos" series Opteron processors, which with their eight dual-core modules and four memory units fall right into line with this rumoured Durango spec. The current pre-beta of Microsoft's Windows 8, furthermore, has diagnostic support for up to 640 logical cores.

***Its processing power is in line with high-end PC specs, and might even eclipse them come Christmas next year***

Durango has the specs of a complete media portal

This kind of insane horsepower is really only useful to web hosts and other high-octane users. What a four or eight-core CPU with multithreading means for a games console is a much more efficient handling of variously demanding tasks. In a media box with integrated Kinect support, background downloading, personal video recording functionality, social connectivity and high-end gaming, the advantages become clear.

## ONLY DOES EVERYTHING

And Durango most certainly is a media box. Our sources tell us it even has a standard aerial socket in the back – a kind of integrated version of PS3's PlayTV dongle – to give it complete ownership of your TV activities. The Blu-ray drive is a dead cert, we're told, and joins Freeview, Sky and a wealth of on-demand services in being controlled by Kinect.

Complementing AMD's latest CPU in Durango is a member of its current top-flight GPU family, the Radeon HD 7000. This implies the same "Southern Islands" GPU (or thereabouts) as Sony's PS4 reportedly uses; which means the same concerns about how a top-performing GPU today is supposed to compete in over a year's time, and beyond. Rest assured, though, that the requirements for home console graphics are substantially lower than on a PC, and that plenty of cheap ways have come along to achieve previously demanding image processing. What's unknown is whether the broader applications of this media-centric console will make a gaming GPU like 360's Xenos undesirable.

Rumours persist that Durango, like Orbis, will use ubiquitous broadband across its key markets to justify on-board measures against preowned sales. How this might work is unclear, but the anticipated model is one of games being 'bound' to a specific user or console and restricted if used elsewhere. A familiar online pass system could then restore the games, for a price, if bought secondhand. GameStop CEO Paul Raines was sceptical, though, saying to Kotaku that "the model simply hasn't been proven to work".

*Perhaps Microsoft's biggest challenge is Xbox Live, which is notoriously hostile for developers*

## THE ENEMY WITHIN

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing Microsoft's next gen is itself. Xbox Live is a notoriously hostile portal for developers, massively favouring the big publishers who are now less and less popular thanks to Steam, the App Store, and (though the fate of this option is uncertain) crowd-funding. While it's true that strict policing and QA have kept quality levels on XBLA high, the burial of its Indie Games channel within the 360 dashboard deprives those developers of their marketing lifeblood: visibility. As such, they and their games have been lost to other platforms.

At the other end of the market, *Dust 514* maker CCP had a very blunt reason for going PlayStation exclusive: "Sony allows us to use our systems," said CTO Halldor Fannar to Eurogamer. "Microsoft has Xbox Live. They're very strict on that. There's a lot of issues we run into. It may be a basic thing people don't realise, but with *Dust* and *EVE* on Sony's network, we can allow them to chat. Voice chat, text chat, that's all one world."

Kinect will run through everything that Durango does

With the emergence of free-to-play requiring a speedier and cheaper interface between developers and their online games – just to patch an XBLA game costs a publisher $40k, says Double Fine's Tim Schafer – Microsoft needs to lighten up, basically, on both the identity and the terms of its service. If it doesn't, then people may abandon the next Xbox regardless of what's inside it. ■

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# THE 20 BEST XBLA GAMES YOU CAN PLAY RIGHT NOW

## And they're all less than £11...

Myth #1: games are expensive. Sure, the ones you buy in boxes are, but the ones you can buy via Xbox Live, aren't. 1200 MS points works out at just over £10. Myth #2: XBLA games are all throw-away retro nonsense. No. Most are full, new games, and some are even AAA. So here are the 20 best, boldest, maddest and value-packed games on XBLA, and you can download most in a few minutes...

**KEY OF INVENTION**
**GAMES AT A GLANCE**

- Only on Xbox
- Quirky art style
- Retro style
- Hidden gem
- Multiplayer
- 500+ MB

## ALAN WAKE'S AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

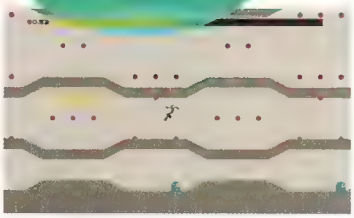
**Price** > 1200 **Released** > Feb 2012 **Size** > 1.33GB
**XBL link** > goo.gl/tPjgg

**What is it? An episodic, semi-sequel to the first *Alan Wake***

Perhaps the best example of what XBLA is capable of. An *Alan Wake* sequel in all but name, it even improves on combat, pacing and story-telling. It sees Alan track down a serial killer willed to life by a small town. For 1200 points, it's a bargain, and better than most £40 adventure games.

NIGHT SPRING

# THE 20 KILLER XBLA GAMES YOU CAN PLAY RIGHT NOW



Don't under estimate the simple looks of *N+*... it'll test your skills to creaking point

## 2 N+

**Price**> 800 **Released**> Feb 2008
**Size**> 13.03MB **XBL link**> goo.gl/yhDop

**What is it? Stick-man style puzzle platformer** Originally a simple browser game, *N+* puts you in charge of a stick-man ninja who can leap through basic levels and cling to walls. The key here is in the simple controls, which makes the jumping a joy. It might look simple, but it's highly addictive.

## 3 GEOMETRY WARS RETRO EVOLVED 2

**Price**> 800 **Released**> Jul 2008 **Size**> 40.36MB
**XBL link**> goo.gl/x3tl4

**What is it? Beautiful shooter, born in Gotham** First appearing as a mini-game in *Project Gotham Racing*, this a colourful twin-stick shooter with both multiplayer and competitive leaderboards. And we mean competitive...

Hello madam. Would you think it sinister if I asked you to jump inside me? Oh...

## 4 STACKING

**Price**> 1200 **Released**> Feb 2011
**Size**> 993.65MB **XBL link**> goo.gl/MQStw

**What is it? Comedy puzzle adventure by Double Fine** One of the funniest games ever made. You play as a young chimney sweep (well, he's a small Russian doll actually) who climbs into larger dolls to solve puzzles and reunite his family. The charming art style and character-filled dolls make this an XBLA treasure.

## 5

## LIMBO

**Price**> 1200 **Released**> Jul 2010
**Size**> 117.40MB **XBL link**> goo.gl/PwZ3g

**What is it? Stylish, dark adventure with arty visuals** You learn by dying in *Limbo*. It's a game all about getting a small, silhouetted boy from the start to the end of each level, avoiding lethal traps and hazards as you go. Except avoiding them is tough. So you die, you quick restart, and you improve.

Buy this for Wake Island, one of the best multiplayer maps ever designed

## 6 BATTLEFIELD 1943

**Price** > 1200 **Released** > Jul 2009
**Size** > 559.32MB **XBL link** > goo.gl/fL3nl

What is it? **Multiplayer-only FPS set in WW2** Classic multiplayer *Battlefield* without the rubbish campaign mode? Yes please. You get an online game that's still active with all classic *BF* modes, and five great maps.

Be sure to prepare some gentle music for when you finish – *Ikaruga* is brain-melting!

## 7 IKARUGA

**Price** > 800 **Released** > Apr 2008
**Size** > 49.39MB **XBL link** > goo.gl/4cNNS

What is it? **Retro styled, bullet-hell shooter** Want more bullets on your screen than you can hope to process? You've come to the right place. A scrolling, bullet-hell shooter, *Ikaruga* is hardcore, but utterly brilliant.

Hang about... anyone get the feeling they've been here before...?

## 8 BRAID

**Price** > 800 **Released** > Aug 2010 **Size** > 144.45MB **XBL link** > goo.gl/X1BSN

What is it? **Smart time-manipulating puzzle platformer for people who like to think**
Hailed as the smartest game on XBLA, *Braid* is at once simple and incredibly complex. On the surface it's a taxing, time-bending platformer. Look deeper and it's a collection game for perfectionists, and oh yeah, a comment on the destructive nature of man...

## 9 SERIOUS SAM: THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

**Price** > 1200 **Released** > Jan 2010 **Size** > 493.28MB
**XBL link** > goo.gl/wclb4

What is it? **Mad shooter with solo or co-op play**
*Serious Sam*, with his massive guns, deliberately generic look and epic boss fights harks back to classic Xbox shooters like *Doom 3* and *Quake 4*. Sadly, the humour is a bit weak, but the action is gloriously excessive.

## 10 CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

**Price** > 800 **Released** > Mar 2007 **Size** > 95.32MB
**XBL link** > goo.gl/clv51

What is it? **Ridiculously hardcore retro platformer**
The daddy of the bastard-hard *'Vania* series. It still holds up as a great action adventure game, but it stands as more of a prestige title that you have to tell people you've played just so that they know you have exquisite taste.

## THE FIVE BEST GAMES ON DEMAND

Cheap AAA games available for download

1 **Halo 3**

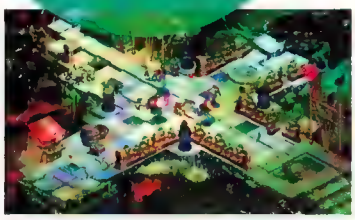
2 **COD4: Modern Warfare**

3 **BioShock**

4 **GTA IV**

5 **Resident Evil 4 HD**

# THE 20 KILLER XBLA GAMES YOU CAN PLAY RIGHT NOW

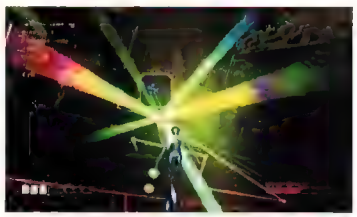


Gloriously-designed, world-building role-playing with one heck of an ending

## 11 BASTION

**Price>** 1200 **Released>** Jul 2011
**Size>** 558.46MB **XBL link>** goo.gl/wJ3Cc

**What is it? Thought-provoking adventure game** Harking back to the golden days of classic RPGs, here you play as the Kid as he attempts to rebuild his world after it's shattered by a cataclysmic event. It's deep, beautiful to both look at and play, and has one of the best endings to any game.

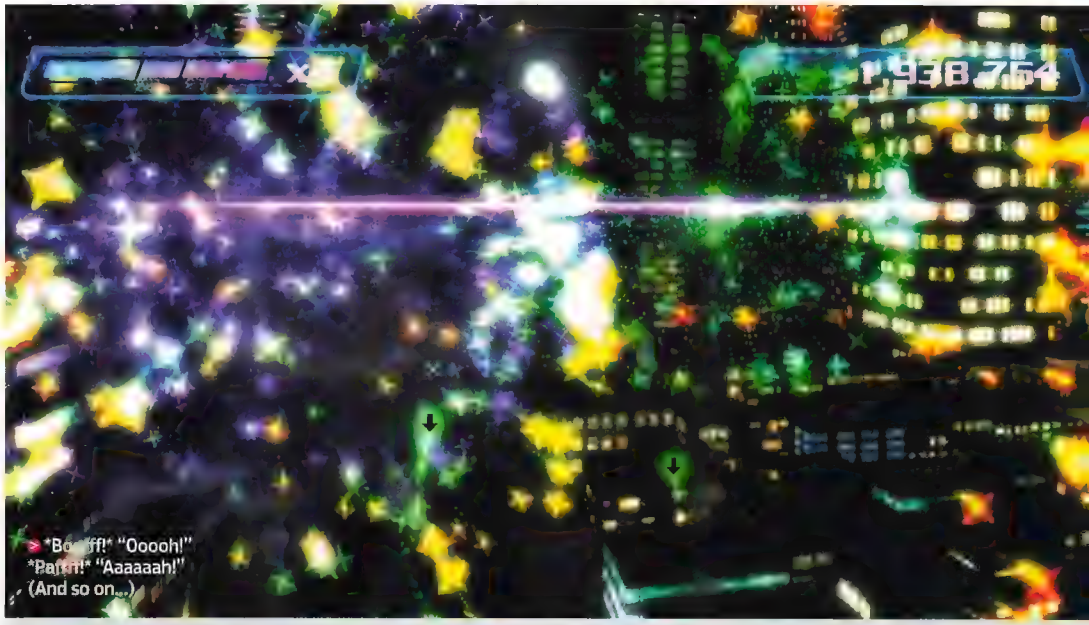


An endless, violent scrap in a psychedelic disco, a bit like Tron visiting Studio 54

## 12 REZ HD

**Price>** 800 **Released>** Jan 2008
**Size>** 119.31MB **XBL link>** goo.gl/UYzxI

**What is it? Retro-style rhythm shooter with huge beats** What looks like your Windows screensaver having a fit is in fact a classic rhythm shooter. Here you blast enemies in time with a beat in a psychopathic death dance as you fly through each Lawnmower Man-looking level.




## 14 BOOM BOOM ROCKET

**Price>** 800 **Released>** Apr 2007 **Size>** 78.6MB **XBL link>** goo.gl/dxZPi

**What is it? Musical fire-work exploding game from Bizarre Creations** A rhythm action game; much in the vein of *Guitar Hero*. Only here fireworks whoosh into the night sky and you press a button or direction (on the d-pad) to detonate them, all to the beat of remixed classical tunes. Colourful, classy fun.

## 15 CASTLE CRASHERS

**Price>** 1200 **Released>** Aug 2008
**Size>** 139.87MB **XBL link>** goo.gl/ZOees

**What is it? Four player cartoon hack 'n' slash** Forget *Fable Heroes*, this is the four-player hack 'n' slash game you're looking for. Yes, it's super-tough – even with four players – but the neat art style, geeky laughs, and excessive gore make the pain worth it.

## 16 TOY SOLDIERS: COLD WAR

**Price>** 1200 **Released>** Aug 2011
**Size>** 945.15MB **XBL link>** goo.gl/vyTrq

**What is it?, Multi-discipline third-person shooter** A surprisingly solid shooter that carries on the work *Army Men* started last generation. The shooting is entertaining, if not quite faultless, but the action is relentless and the vehicles varied.

## 13 SHADOW COMPLEX

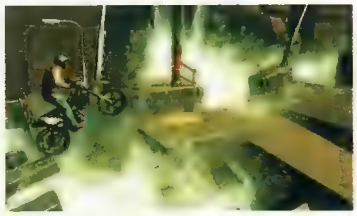
**Price>** 1200 **Released>** Aug 2009 **Size>** 835.42MB **XBL link>** goo.gl/XGouq

**What is it? 360's own Metroid, made in collaboration with Epic** *Shadow Complex* not only looks brilliant, it also nails that chunky feeling of shooting everything to pieces that *Gears* does so well. On rails sections are, unusually, a highlight here.

## 17 DEAD RISING CASE WEST

**Price>** 800 **Released>** Dec 2010
**Size>** 1.14GB **XBL link>** goo.gl/8Gr04

**What is it? Stand-alone *Dead Rising* short** So, you've finished *Dead Rising 2* and need a little more zombie-killing in your life? *Case West* brings back original game hero Frank, along with his trusty camera, and lets you smash undead skulls for five or so hours. So simple, so pure.

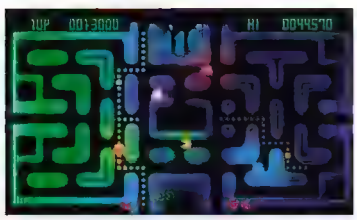


It looks simple but, even if you hate bikes, you'll be playing this for hours at a time

## 18 TRIALS EVOLUTION

**Price>** 1200 **Released>** Apr 2012
**Size>** 1.23GB **XBL link>** goo.gl/zzmVJ

**What is it? Addictive motocross mini-games** Not just a vanilla, physics-based motocross sim. Oh no. This is rammed with straight races, mini-games, excellent four-player multiplayer, competitive leaderboards, and an incredible track editor that lets you build the physics-defying obstacles and roadways of your fevered motorcycling dreams. Now based in the great outdoors, the tracks are brighter and more challenging (and there's a massive 50 of them in single player Career mode). Plus you can fully customise your bike and rider. It's huge.



Who needs all that hi tech co-op stuff? Sometimes the past is better than the now

## 19 PAC-MAN CHAMP EDITION

**Price>** 800 **Released>** Jun 2007
**Size>** 49.56MB **XBL link>** goo.gl/oi925

**What is it? Pill munching, ghost-dodging retro fun** Yes, it's been around for an age, but this is the definitive version of *Pac-Man*. There's every flavour of pill-scoffing you could ever want – Championship mode, two Challenge modes and three Extra modes. But you know the form. Dash down darkened corridors avoiding the spooks and trawling up all the spotty goodness you can find, to the sound of a plinky plonky techno soundtrack. It's a bit like clubbing in the 1990s, only slightly less sweaty...

## 20 FEZ

**Price>** 800 **Released>** Apr 2012 **Size>** 273.45MB **XBL link>** goo.gl/1tY7A

**What is it? Retro-looking puzzle game with many layers** Part dimension-shifting puzzler, part code-breaker, all incredibly charming. In *Fez* you rotate the world to navigate your environment in search of cubes. Get cubes, unlock new levels. Simple. Until, that is, you realise that there's much more here than meets the eye – like translating an 'alien' language to find out what's *really* happening...

# "Back to the Drawing board"

When the man behind Deus Ex meets Mickey, you know it won't be just another kids' game. **Warren Spector** hopes to change everything

**Warren Spector defined PC gaming with titles like *Wing Commander*, *Ultima Underworld*, *System Shock*, *Thief* and *Deus Ex* – but when every other PC developer came to 360 and PS3, Spector vanished. He returned in 2010, bringing choice and consequence to the Disney universe with Wii exclusive *Epic Mickey*. Two years later Spector is at last coming to 360, and the mouse is coming with him.**

**XBW The first *Epic Mickey* was so rich in Disney history, including some of the best bits like Fantasia. How do you follow that?**
Oh, we can make Wasteland games for a hundred years and never run out of material, are you kidding me? You go into the Disney archives and you feel like you're in the final scene of Indiana Jones. I guarantee one of the joys for adult players of *Disney Epic Mickey 2* is going to be playing the 'where did that come from' game.

**XBW A lot has changed since Disney made those old cartoons in the early 20th century – Mickey doesn't play geese as accordions anymore, for instance. How much license do you have to modernise such a classic character?**
We had more than I expected, to be honest. In the time we've been making *Epic Mickey*, Disney has said 'no' to me once. We can't show Mickey's teeth. Mickey does not show his teeth. End of story. Other than that it's been a nice collaboration. Some of the core elements of this game came from Disney. Oswald the Lucky Rabbit's return came from them. A world called Wasteland full

One of Spector's earliest projects was a cartoon-based pen and paper RPG

of rejected and forgotten Disney stuff – that came from them. The Phantom Blot as our bad guy came from them. We talked a lot and decided together whether something was appropriate or not. It hasn't been as hard as I expected, or as hard as people think it must be.

**XBW Some of the best parts of the first *Epic Mickey* were just about the opportunity to make mischief in Disney's sandbox...**

Honestly, I've watched a lot of people play this game, kids, adults and boys and girls. My observation is that kids actually have an easy time experimenting. They just run around and do what they want. Adults get stuck and say, "Oh man, what do I do? What do they want me to do here?" The adults are rules-bound and the kids are into experimentation and free play – neither are used to having that kind of freedom where their choices also have consequences.

**XBW That makes *Epic Mickey* different to a lot of kids' games, which are are geared towards rigid storylines.**

A lot of adult games are like that too. I've been resisting that for 23 years. The quickest way to get me to kick you out of my office or give you a lecture is to say the words 'this is where the player does X' or 'the player has to' or 'you need to' or 'the player sees', because I don't believe that's what games should be about. Junction Point is built on the idea that we're going to empower players to be the creative force on the game. I don't want to make games more like movies, and I don't want to control the experience, I want the player to create the experience.

***"I don't want to control the experience, I want the player to create the experience"***

**XBW What games have you been excited by recently?**

Well, I tend to play a little bit of a lot of games these days. It's an issue when you start making games and have ridiculous hours. I finished only two games in the last year. One of them was *Heavy Rain*, which I came to a little late, and the other was *Deus Ex Human Revolution*, surprise surprise. *Heavy Rain* I thought was an amazing experience. I would never make a game like that, but as a player I thought it was swell. I have no interest in making a game like that.

*Deus Ex Human Revolution* I really liked. If you had asked my wife, she would tell you, "Warren was screaming at the screen the entire time he played," which I do when I play any game. They made three or four design decisions that I just thought, "Why would you do that? I would never do that." But when I got to the end of the game, I sat back and reflected and said, "Holy cow, that felt like

## FOOTNOTES

1 The Cartoon Wasteland is the dumping ground for every idea Disney forgot. When Mickey fell into the Wasteland he found it ruled by his older brother, Oswald. They fought for a time, but united to defeat the Shadow Blot at the end of *Epic Mickey*.

2 Oswald the Lucky Rabbit is the star of Walt Disney's third animated series, dating back to 1927. When producers at Universal refused to give Disney a raise, he created Mickey with animator Ub Iwerks at his own company. Disney regained rights to the rabbit in 2006.

3 Spector's studio was founded in 2005 with employees from his former company, Ion Storm. Plans for *Epic Mickey* were already in place at Disney as a means to revitalise Mickey – hence reclaiming Oswald – and Disney bought Junction Point in 2007 to bring the game to life.

*Deus Ex*, and it sounded like *Deus Ex*, and it made me stop and think about my life, myself, and the world the way a *Deus Ex* game should." So what I want to do is go to the Games Developers' Conference and do a panel, and really figure out how you can make different design decisions and achieve the same goals.

I love the guys who worked on that game. I know those guys and I've talked to them a bunch. They made three or four decisions that... I don't want to talk about it... I want to think about it and I want to do some writing or talking about it at some point.

**XBW What were your tactics when you played through *Human Revolution*? Stealthy? Aggressive?**
When I was making the first game I had to test all sort of approaches. It's very hard for me to play the violent way. I have a lot of trouble being the guy who shoots a lot of stuff and fights all the time.

There was a point on the first *Deus Ex* when we were at alpha and tuning the game, trying to make it perfect. I remember putting my head on my desk going, "Why don't I just make a shooter? Oh my God. If people judge our combat against something like *Half-Life* – which was state of the art at the time – then we're dead. If people compare our stealth to *Thief*, we're dead. If people compare our role-playing elements to *Neverwinter Nights*, we're dead. There are games that are razor sharp in their focus, but if people get that in our game they can decide how to play or shift back and forth – that if a combat situation is too hard for them they can try something else – then we're going to rule the world." Luckily people got that, knock on wood, they got it.

**XBW You have to show a lot of faith in players to make that approach work.**
Exactly, and that's true of *Disney Epic Mickey 2* as well. I describe the games that I make as Swiss Army knives. If you want to operate on someone you get a scalpel, not a Swiss Army knife. If you want to saw a log, get a saw, not a Swiss Army knife. But if you want to be able to do both of those things, you better have a Swiss Army knife.

The *Epic Mickey* games, you can decide if we succeed or not, but in terms of their goals they're all about letting you decide what kind of experience you have. Is it an action-adventure game like *Zelda*? Yeah. Is it a *Mario* style platformer? Yeah. Is it an RPG? Yeah. It's a Swiss Army knife.

**XBW Everyone knows who Mickey is and how he sounds, but Oswald is as much a new character as he is an old one. How did you approach him?**

## EVOLUTION OF THE MOUSE

How the lessons of Epic Mickey have been brought to the sequel

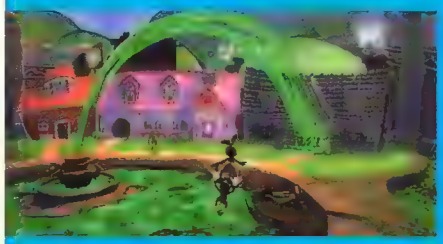
Mickey's brush brings the wasteland back to life and creates new areas to explore

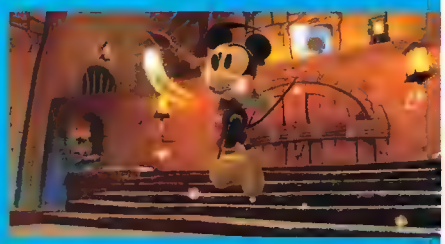
Never write off the mouse. *Epic Mickey 2* is the closest 360 will ever come to its own *Mario 64* or *Zelda*, and it's *Mario* by way of *Deus Ex*, where you're the one deciding what kind of Mickey you're going to be.

Spector's obsession with cartoons goes back to university and his early work on pen-and-paper RPGs with Steve Jackson Games. "I have a bunch of cartoon game proposals that got shot down by every publisher I've worked with," he says. "But in the paper game world I was the 'funny guy', y'know? I did a cartoon RPG, I did the Rocky And Bullwinkle party RPG, I wrote my master's thesis on cartoons, I taught animation at the University of Texas. *Epic Mickey*'s a return to my roots really."

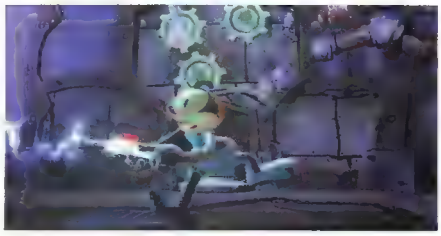
"*Epic Mickey* doesn't hold you to a single course of events," said our friends on Nintendo Gamer in their review of the first game. "Quests have multiple solutions. Maps have multiple routes." But they added, "It's rarely a good platformer." Spector knows that has to change for the sequel: "You'll have a better experience in this game because we just know more about our game, our world, our tools, our levels."

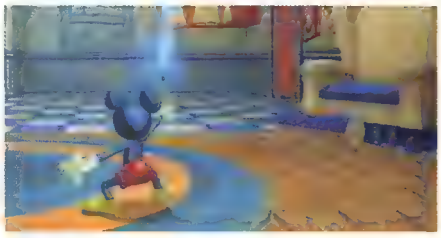
"There are things we did exceptionally well, and there are things we did less well. We built a studio, we built a code base, we built a team, we created a world, we defined our characters, we created a storyline. I couldn't be prouder of a team. It was amazing, but I guarantee it's going to be a better experience this time."





The 360 and PS3 ports of *Epic Mickey 2* are handled by UK devs Blitz





Even after two decades in the business, Spector is the nicest man in games

Nobody knows of him, but he's been around forever. Go on YouTube, all 13 of his cartoons are on there now. We wanted to capture some of that chaotic energy that he has. He's really a very cartoony character. He can be set on fire, and you put the fire out and he's fine. He detaches his arm and throws it like a boomerang, he removes his ears constantly and uses them as oars or bats. I think he's without question the most cartoony character that Disney, the man or the company, ever came up with.

We wanted him to be a little bit of Mickey because they're brothers, and a little bit of a cartoon rabbit from another company that I shouldn't name – a little bit of that cockiness. The thing about Oswald, if you watch his cartoons, he's overly sure of himself. He's a cocky little rabbit, and he's a randy little rabbit. He falls in love with a different girl every cartoon. There's something going on there. I don't know, whether Walt was in a weird place in his life? I don't know what the deal was. I long ago gave up psychoanalysing Walt Disney.

In a weird sort of way, Walt was a game designer, he didn't know it, but he was a game designer. We used the stuff like the boomerang arm. I'm completely certain people are going to say "that's right out of *Zelda*", but really it's right out of a cartoon that Walt did in 1927. Grabbing onto Mickey's ankles – "it's from Sonic and Tails" – but it's right out of cartoons from the 20s. We didn't have to make a whole lot up, we just had to go back to the original source.

**XBW Do you care what other developers have done with Mickey in the past?**
OK, here's a really obnoxious answer: no! I don't care about what other developers have done with Mickey! I play a lot of games as a player and at some level I'm sure it affects what I do but I've never... Wait, that's not true! Once! This one time I was *so* frustrated by a game I was working on. I was frustrated by *Thief* [5]. *Deus Ex* exists today because I said, "I'm gonna show these guys that I can make a game where you can sneak and fight and make it work." Because I tried desperately to get the *Thief* team to let me fight my way past problems I can't sneak past.

***"In a weird sort of way, Walt Disney didn't know it, but he was a game designer"***

**XBW *Mickey*'s not a response to anyone else's game, then?**
No. No, absolutely not. Really, *Deus Ex* is the only time I've said, "I'm gonna answer a question that this game asked." But all of my games come out of frustration with other games or inspiration from other games. *Mickey* – if you want to know what it was inspired by in terms of its gameplay – as much as I love the *Zelda* games and the *Mario* games I just felt like, other than the graphics, there haven't been enough design advances in platforming and action-adventure to make me happy. What I wanted to do was try to introduce some new kinds of gameplay into those classic genres, but I made a conscious decision not to play the old *Mickey* games because I didn't want to be prejudiced by what they had done. I wanted to make a Junction Point *Mickey* game that would not feel like other games.

## FOOTNOTES

4 Ken Levine described Looking Glass as a "university" for game designers. 'Graduates' have worked on some of the best games in the business, including *Half-Life 2*, *Oblivion*, *Deus Ex*, *BioShock* and *Portal 2*. Looking Glass closed in 2000 – perhaps it was a better university than a business.

5 *Thief: The Dark Project* beat Splinter Cell to be the first stealth game to use sounds, shadows and light. 1998 was a big year for the new stealth genre, with the release of *MGS*, *Thief* and *Tenchu*. Spector's Ion Storm studio made *Thief 3* – one of the ever best stealth games ever.

6 It's easy to read this as a gag in print, but Spector wasn't joking about the *High School Musical* thing. Disney Interactive have made a series of karaoke and rhythm games based on *HSM*, but they're not ready for the tough moral choices Spector could throw at Sharpay and co.

Like the best Disney movies, *Epic Mickey* is fun for anyone of any age

**XBW We're into the idea that *Epic Mickey 2* is a musical. What are your favourites from Disney's archives?**

Snow White, just because it was the first. There are some great songs in Pinocchio. I love the Lion King, and Beauty And The Beast. They are all swell. In terms of my favourite musical films of all time, they're things no one's heard of, frankly. I love 42nd Street, and I love On The Town. On The Town is maybe one of the two or three greatest American films of all time. It starred Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra and a guy called Jules Munchen who no one remembers, sadly. I saw the original cast of Oliver on Broadway. I saw the original cast of Camelot – Richard Burton and Julie Andrews. I just saw Promises, Promises on Broadway. I got the whole cast to sign a poster for me. I love musicals, I just love them. Frankly I shouldn't admit this. I loved High School Musical. I keep telling Disney, 'Let me do a High School Musical game, I totally know how to do it.' No one's taken me up on that.

**XBW So why have you saved *Epic Mickey 2*'s song-and-dance numbers for the cutscenes? Why not do it as a full musical and have characters burst into song in the middle of a level?**

You know, I'm sad to say, because I have a vision of the future – but sad to say it's completely isolated from the gameplay just because I needed people to not reject the game out of hand because it has songs. Even though Disney is known for songs, there are people I work with every day who are convinced that gamers won't accept songs in the game.

I have more faith in gamers. They're going to be OK with it. Junction Point have been at the forefront of so many innovations in the last 20 years. In *Epic Mickey* on the Wii we were introducing a new audience to the idea of choice and consequence, so we did choice and consequence light. This time we're doing a light musical.

Honestly it's my intention to go further in the future whether people like it or not, but I just wanted to keep it isolated for now and make sure that if you weren't into music you can skip it. Videogames can be a really conservative medium. ■

# HOW ONLINE GAMING IS KILLING GAMES

## The best way to wreck a game is to share it with other people, grumbles Richard Cobbett

**After writing "hell is other people", it's said that the philosopher Jean-Paul Satre sat back in his chair, smiled to himself, and enjoyed a moment's transcendent joy that the other people he had to deal with had never come armed with a plasma rifle or – worse – a headset. Nothing destroys a great game like letting other people into it.**

We all know that wandering onto the average public server means mixing it up with every racist, sexist, shrieking little monster capable of finding their parents' credit cards, and every new game is their playground far more than it's ours. Anonymity, a guarantee of not being punched in the face and a high-testosterone environment all go together to breed spectacular acts of dickishness, and you need only check sites like fatuglyorslutty.com to see just how bad people can get. The spelling and grammar alone...

But they're only *part* of the problem. Even friends can break the game, because their presence destroys the fantasy. In a shooter for instance, the single-player is usually about feeling like the ultimate badass. Correct? Correct. Maybe you're a space marine type, or an unstoppable Duke Nukem-esque force of nature, mankind's last best hope. Jump into the multiplayer mode though, and you instantly revert to just being Jack Pot 86 and Tom Bola 89, two regular humans, separated by miles, shooting the shit and also some people. That feeling of being *special* in a world where you're the star? It doesn't exist when eight of you are taking on a team of clones in different costumes.

Even if you win, what have you won? A single, meaningless round, instantly forgotten as the next rolls in and resets the score counter. That's not much of a reward for being constantly shouted at, often insulted, and regularly teabagged, is it? Didn't you sign up for this to *save the world*? More importantly, didn't you pay about fifty quid? Sure, you'll have great rounds where everything clicks... but when the round is over, what are you left with? The current obsession with earning levels and unlocks is every game designer's admission that running around the same map and fighting the same endless, futile battles just isn't that much fun. Progression is their substitute for narrative and design; a carefully measured feed of treats to keep you interested and trick you into thinking that the last round mattered.

***"Multiplayer means mixing it up with a world of racist, sexist, shrieking monsters"***

There are some games where the multiplayer is everything. There may well be people who bought, say, *Street Fighter IV* to enjoy its plot, but they're firmly in the minority and are definitely weird. But the biggest games out there almost never sell themselves as multiplayer experiences; even *Modern Warfare* and *Battlefield 3* used campaign footage and story-centric moments in every commercial and press release. Multiplayer moments are instantly forgotten, but a good single player experience can live forever.

Compare *Skyrim* or *Dark Souls* to any MMORPG – the world density, the freedom, the sense of personal power and development. You put a few hours into the game and you get to feel like a hero, and the hero you want to be. Put a thousand into *World of Warcraft* and you end up an unappreciated serf, enjoying epic dialogue like "wtf mage?!" and getting shouted at for wearing underpowered trousers. A million players can't make an experience with even a tenth of the epic scope of a well-designed solo campaign, where every moment, the world is reacting to *you*.

Single player is always more satisfying. It gives us characters to remember, a goal to achieve beyond 'getting a bit better at this', worlds that rise and fall based on our actions and achievements, and a front-row seat in events you'll remember forever. The moment you rode into Mexico, the moment you spoke No Russian, the moment GlaDOS sang you a song, the moment you learned the secret behind "Would you kindly..." At best, other players destroy that by reminding us that the game is artificial. At worst, you've got the average online gamer: a screaming, raving dickbag. Either way, who needs 'em? ■

*Battlefield 3*'s online community is friendlier than *COD*, but still hostile

*Dark Souls* is a great solo game – until other people invade your story...

*SFIV*'s more 'hardcore' community means the douche-count is low. Ish...

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# Japanese games can rule the world once more

## It's been a rough ride this generation but Japan will rise again, says XBW's man in Tokyo, Daniel Robson

You have to hit the history books to understand why Japan's game industry has failed to dominate the western charts this generation. It all starts in the Edo Period, when Japan's rulers banned all contact with the outside world for nearly 200 years. It's an isolationist mindset that never fully went away.

Japan became hugely westernised after World War 2 and continues to nurture close political ties with America, but it has evolved into its own cultural groove. Recent sales trends in games, music, and film have shown that young Japanese people are beginning to reject western pop culture all over again. Meanwhile in the west, Japanese-made games have never been less successful.

That's left Japanese game companies in a pickle: do they cater to the safe local market or the radically different tastes of the west? Most have taken the first option. Japan is a huge market, with a population of 128 million and a deep gaming culture. Why should Capcom, for example, change *Monster Hunter* to appeal to a global audience when the series has sold 21 million in Japan alone?

"Japan has become very much closed to the rest of the world," says Keiji Inafune, one time global head of production at Capcom, and now founder of indie studios Intercept and Comcept. "Japanese games used to sell better than any other country's, but western developers assimilated the best elements of Japanese games – *God Of War* is a total copy of Japanese-style games, and it's excellent! Japan has only just started to learn from American games in return, and now we're several years behind."

### A MATTER OF COST

Japanese developers know how to exploit their home market, but if their games are going to appeal only to a Japanese audience, then there's a limit to the available budget. Shinji Mikami left Capcom to set up his own studio, Tango Gameworks. It was acquired in 2010 by ZeniMax Asia, granting Mikami the global platform and American-sized budgets that he hopes will give his games the edge. "Hollywood spends a billion dollars producing a movie, and you can make an incredible movie with that sort of money, but Japanese studios don't spend anything like that," he says. "The scale of the budgets is totally different."

Hideo Kojima agrees. "The Japanese game industry has fallen to the point where Japanese movies are at," he told Eurogamer.

"Because the scale is so small, we can't get the budget to make a game succeed on a global level."

Added to this insularity, Japan's economy is in steady decline all round. Recent high-profile scandals at Tokyo Electric Power Co and Olympus have highlighted a culture of corporate conspiracy, collusion and nepotism. A lack of innovation has seen companies like Sony lose market share in TVs to South Korea, portable electronics to Apple in North America, and, yes, game software to American semi-newcomers Microsoft.

## CULTURAL FAILURE

Tight budgets hold developers back, but many blame Japan's culture of risk-aversion for the decline. While businesses in the west, and especially America, have long understood that experiment and failure is a vital learning process that fosters success, Japanese companies are terrified of losing face. "You can't succeed without failing along the way," says Inafune. "Japanese people go out of their way to avoid failure, because we have a culture of hara-kiri [ritual suicide]. The samurai code precluded failure, and that code still lives on today."

The major Japanese developers – household names such as Sony, Capcom, Namco Bandai, Square Enix, Sega, Konami and Nintendo – continue to experiment, but most of their output plays safe. Proven brands such as *Resident Evil*, *Mario* and *Final Fantasy* are popular worldwide; curiosities like Namco's massive *Idolmaster* series are big enough at home to make up for slim western appeal. The bigger the company, the tinier the innovations.

Many of Japan's top creators are fed up with the malaise and are striking out on their own. Mikami and Inafune both blame Capcom's sheer size – it has over 1,600 consolidated employees – for their departure from the developer / publisher. "Capcom grew so large," says Mikami. "I think it's a great company. I think it's right that a company like that should have strict rules, but as a creative person I felt I needed more freedom, and that was getting harder to find."

## 5 ESSENTIAL RECENT JAPANESE GAMES

1. Lollipop Chainsaw
Schoolgirls plus zombies? Yeah, go on then. Suda51 is on top form with this tongue-in-cheek slasher.

2. Dark Souls
The no-quarter difficulty is distinctly Japanese, but won the west. Forcing developers rethink online play.

3. Dragon's Dogma
*Dogma* throws out the JRPG rulerook and drops you in an open world where you make your own destiny.

4. Street Fighter X Tekken
The *Street Fighter* series proves Japan is unbeatable in the world of fighting games. Nobody does it better.

5. Vanquish
Japan's best independent developer shows western teams what cover-based shooters should do next.

Most industries in Japan are dominated by a few major players that collude to squeeze out the independents. But artisanal excellence is still revered, and many breakaway developers go solo because they're after more control over the games they make. Tango Gameworks is not a standalone company, but a development team within ZeniMax. Even so, Mikami feels

***"You can't succeed without failing along the way. The samurai code precluded failure, and that code still lives on today"***

that his team of 65 full-timers is more manageable than the huge teams at Capcom. (*Resident Evil 6* has 600 names attached to it.) "The maximum would be about 100 people I think – I wouldn't want more than that," says Mikami of his ideal team. "For one thing, I wouldn't be able to remember everyone's names! The easiest number of people to move in a certain direction is one; with every person, it gets more difficult."

Inafune's two companies, Intercept and Comcept, share a staff of just 20, most of whom are fellow defectors from Capcom. He says he wants to keep his team small. "Being in charge of 900 people and thinking about a huge company's future, there was a lot of stress," he says. "My companies can move 100 times faster."

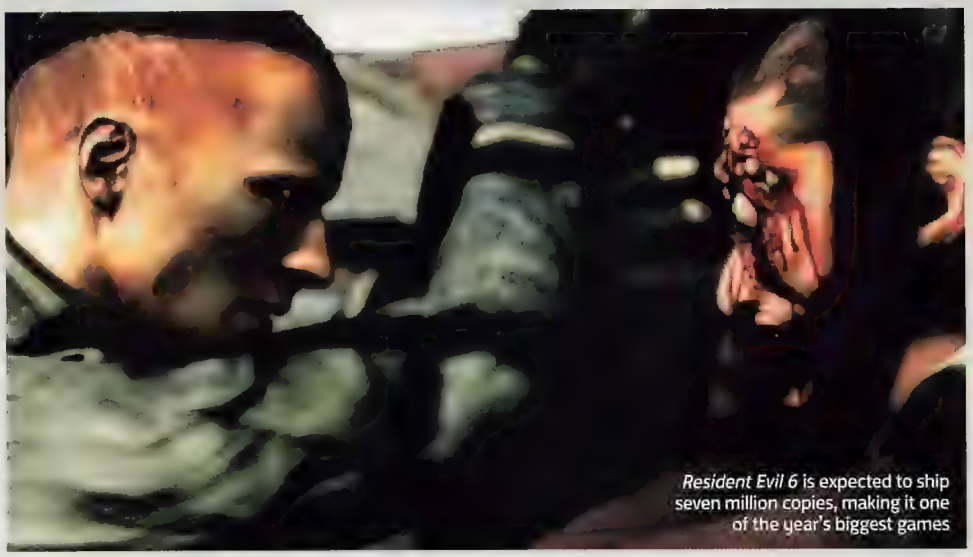
"The benefits of being independent are the freedom it allows, and being able to take all the responsibility on yourself," says *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi, who left Square Enix to found Mistwalker in 2004. "We only have around the same number of staff as a development team from the NES era, but it allows for greater communication of ideas through the team."

Last year, Fumito Ueda left Sony to complete his long-delayed *The Last Guardian* as a freelancer. No one knows how much control Ueda has retained over the game, or the full story behind his departure. But his next project will almost certainly take a radically different tack.

"I think Ueda's been through the wringer," sympathises Inafune. "It gets ever more difficult to make the sort of games you want to make when you belong to a large publisher. If you're truly creative and you want to make something special, it's very hard to see eye-to-eye with the money men."

## THE GROUND OPENED UP

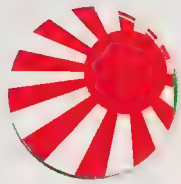
Japan's game industry has been on a brave new road for several years now. New studios like Platinum and Tango, a new western-styled approach to the press from *Street Fighter*'s Yoshinori Ono and *Tekken*'s Katsuhiro Harada, and boundary-breaking experiments like *Dark Souls* and *Dragon's Dogma* have set the stage Japan's games business to advance into the next generation.



*Resident Evil 6* is expected to ship seven million copies, making it one of the year's biggest games

And then there was the earthquake. On 11 March 2011, 16,000 lives were lost in a quake and tsunami of unprecedented scale. The triple-meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant will take decades to clean up. The disasters showed Japan's strengths – there were no riots, just peaceful cooperation – but the government and power company's slow response also highlighted its flaws: bureaucracy, insularity and a lack of personal accountability.

In the aftermath of the quake, Japan discovered a newfound sense of consumer patriotism. Konami's Hideo Kojima, Platinum's Atsushi Inaba and Sega's Toshihiro Nagoshi have all spoken about their desire to help restore Japan's national pride in the wake of the earthquake. "'Made in Japan' is a good thing," says Nagoshi. "I think Japanese games should wear that 'made in Japan' badge on their chests with pride and march boldly into the Western market."



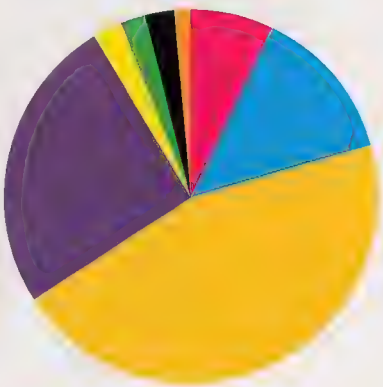
*Binary Domain* was Nagoshi's most western game, and while it was only half-successful, the new global mindset of Japanese developers – and the global budgets that come with it – could mean better games for everybody.

"If I had the money, I'd open an American branch tomorrow," says Inafune. Four of his 20 staff have lived overseas, and a fifth is a Canadian national. "Japan would be stronger if it collaborated with other countries more. We should make the most of Japan's good points and mix them with the good points of other countries to make better products."

Konami and Square Enix are banking on new technology to lead Japan into the next generation. Kojima's Fox Engine and Square's Luminous Engine are built to compete with Epic, Crytek and DICE. It all boils down to flexibility. Japanese society loves rules and can be extremely conservative. But Japan's post-WW2 economy was built on an ability to adapt and improve. After five years of steadily losing ground, Japan is ready to rise once again. ■

## BEST TO THE WEST

The best developer in Japan, according to XBW readers



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|---|---|
| 06 | Platinum Games |
| 11 | Kojima Productions |
| | Capcom |
| 21 | Square Enix |
| | Grasshopper |
| 2 | From Software |
| 2 | Team Ninja |
| 1 | Konami |

# Half-Life

## Dan Griliopoulos reminisces about Valve's rich universe, from Gordon Freeman to Portal 2...

**PROFILE**

**Dan Griliopoulos**
**Not a Freeman – PC**

*"Dan has been playing Half-Life since day one; Half-Life Deathmatch almost got him kicked out of university and the amazing mod scene almost cost him his final exams. These days, he takes a holiday for a new release, like Half Life: Episode 2 or Portal 2."*

What's the iconic moment from the *Half-Life* universe? Perhaps it's being woken by the G-man's pep-talk in *Half-Life 2* as your past and future flashes before your eyes. After twenty years in limbo, you're on a train to alien-occupied City 17. Exiting into the monolithic station hall, a floating camera blinds you with its flash while Dr Breen leers out from the screens way above. The masked Combine soldiers bully you at the checkpoint; their batons descend when you try to flee. You're a stranger in a strange land, and only yesterday you were in the test chamber...

**Six word game summary**

Ginger nerd saves world (for now)

So perhaps it was the original *Half-Life's* monorail ride to the chamber and opening a door to another world. That slow build-up, that ominous hum, that crack as you were catapulted across the universe and returned back to a lab overrun by alien creatures.

Or perhaps it was an altogether different moment – that one in *Portal 2* where you were catapulted towards a test chamber wall by a co-op buddy who put that portal one foot out of place. What is that IDIOT Atlas doing? You're going to be shattered by the impact and rebuilt at the entrance *again* but you can't move your portals because Atlas will need them to follow you and the acid fizzes hungrily below you and the portal *still* isn't there. What the *hell* is wrong with him?

**"The Half-Life series doesn't have one thing that makes it superb; it has many"**

No, it's that moment with the strider on the rooftop, or getting the crossbow just before you meet the ichthyosaur, or crossing the bridge, or the hunters assaulting the White Forest Inn at the end of *Episode 2*. It's finding the first of the Ratman's graffiti-riddled dens, or Alyx's pet tank Dog tearing chunks off the strider in the woods, or fighting for your life with buzz saws and cinder blocks in Ravenholm. It's that bit where GLaDOS sung you a song, where you learned the cake was a lie, where you raced an airboat out of City 17, where you fought side-by-side with a girl you've grown to love.

### PERFECT MOMENTS

And Breathe. I don't have a single stand-out memory of *Half-Life*; I have hundreds of them and they're all different, and they were probably different the way you played them, too. The series doesn't have one thing that makes it superb; it has many, has pioneered many, and will continue to have them as long as Valve has lines in its employee handbook like: "A fearless adventure is knowing what to do when no one's there telling you what to do" – and a team full of people who believe in that.

Valve doesn't know how to stand still. Their first game defined storytelling in first-person shooters and gave you the best

## The Evolution of Half-Life

### HALF-LIFE
PC PS2 > 1998

Gordon Freeman is a scientist trying to prevent an alien invasion of earth that he accidentally triggered. It's a massive hit.

### OPPOSING FORCE
PC > 1999

This expansion introduced a marine who is operating in Black Mesa at the same time Gordon's escaping it.

### BLUE SHIFT
PC > 2001

You played as dull security guard Barney trying to escape Black Mesa. Short and repetitive.

### DECAY
PS2 > 2001

Odd, as it featured missions rather than a flowing world.

You still want to mess with the science geek, eh? You come and try...

## CODENAME: GORDON (AKA HALF-LIFE 2D)

PC > 2004

A free flash game that took what had been revealed of *Half-Life 2* and turned it into a sideways scrolling-platformer.

## HALF-LIFE 2

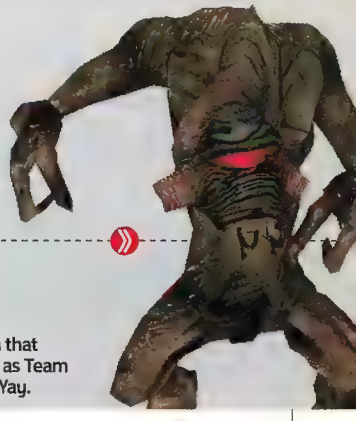
PC, 360, PS3 > 2004

Barely carrying on from *Half-Life*, this retcons a lot of the plot and sees a new alien invasion, to justify new enemy types.

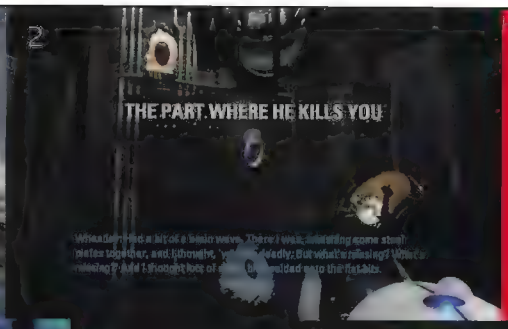
## HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH

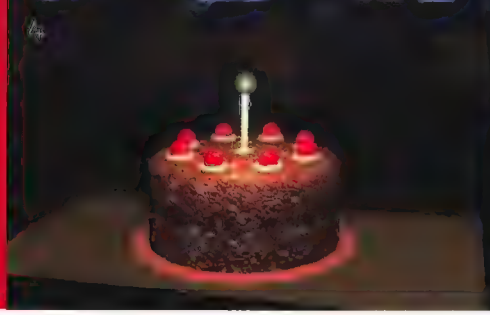
PC > 2004

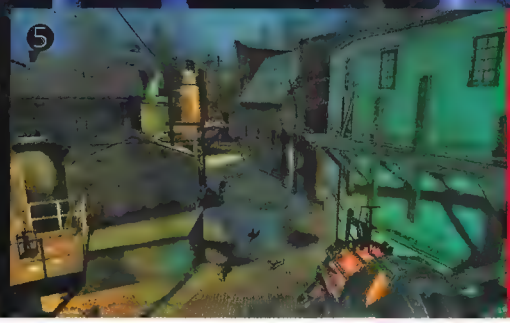
A simple deathmatch mode, to match that released in the original *Half-Life*, as well as Team Deathmatch. Included the Gravity Gun. Yay.



# My Five Favourite Half-Life Moments







## 1 Gnome Chompski
Half-Life 2: Episode Two

This Garden Gnome seems insignificant – but can be your travelling companion for a significant part of *Episode Two* if you choose to chase the Little Rocket Man achievement. It's based on the gnome from Amelie and is named after linguist Noam Chomsky.

## 2 The Part Where He Kills You
Portal 2

One-time buddy AI Wheatley has lied to you, telling you he'll kill you later when in fact he's going to kill you now! You escape in the nick of time, but Wheatley pleads with you to come back. If you do, he acts surprised, but asks you to "jump into the pit". If you do, you unlock the Pit Boss achievement.

## 3 No Choice
Half-Life

It's the end of the game. Black Mesa has been nuked. The G-man saves you, and gives you a choice. Work with him – or not. If you choose not to, he takes all your weapons and leaves you surrounded by monsters. Helluva choice.

## 4 Scone or Sponge?
Portal

GLaDOS's idea of incentivisation throughout *Portal* is to remind you that some cake is waiting for you at the end of the puzzles. Beat the game and, while you don't get any cake, a video shows off the hidden cake waiting for you in the bowels of Aperture Science, which Jonathan Coulton's magnificent song Still Alive plays over the credits.

## 5 We Don't Go To Ravenholm
Half-Life 2

Fleeing the Combine, Gordon has to travel alone through Ravenholm, a former refugee camp that the Combine attacked with the zombifying headcrabs. A mad priest guides you through the darkened streets as the zombies surround you. Grim, last stand territory.

### THE LOST COAST
PC > 2005

A free additional level for *Half-Life 2*, this was a piece of cut content that didn't make the game, but was used to show off Valve's design process.

### EPISODE ONE
PC 360 PS3 > 2006

Originally called *Aftermath*, this sees Gordon and his sidekick Alyx attempt to evacuate City 17 before the Citadel's reactor detonates.

### SURVIVOR
ARCADE > 2006

A twin joystick arcade shooter developed for Japan by Taito. It featured three modes; cut-down story, deathmatch and co-op Mission.

action experience since *Quake*. The second, in 2004, gave you characters you could love, revolutionised environment design, and introduced the world to game-changing physics. *Episodes 1* had the best AI partner ever, *Episode 2* had the boss fight to end all boss fights. *Portal* and *Portal 2* showed the world you could drop the guns and enjoy yourself just with comedy and physics puzzles. *Half-Life*'s greatest moments cover multiplayer, single-player, scripted sequences, emergent gameplay, design, comedy, puzzles, physics. With no self-imposed limits on their ambition, Valve just keep experimenting and tinkering until the thing is perfect.

But what *Half-Life* did best was to give lessons in storytelling and game design, often through scripted sequences in a deeply-designed world. An audacious opening sequence gave you a guided tour of the Black Mesa facility from aboard a smooth monorail – a visual concept stolen by dozens of shooters since. Below you and to the side scurried the enemies and allies of the game, working on all the dangerous, esoteric projects you'd hope Science is working on in a secret base somewhere in the universe (and which you would eventually make such a fight through), while an automated female voice filled you in on the time, date, temperature, social calendar, HR messaging and myriad safety tips. The world, from the off, was believable.

Stepping from this masterclass in foreshadowing, you proceeded through the Sector C test labs, themselves futuristic vignettes of work, security and domesticity all normalised by chipper guards grunting "Morning, Mr Freeman" or scientists muttering "Weren't you meant to be in the test chamber half an hour ago?" You're the focus of attention, both as the key science-hero of the facility and someone who's quite obviously overslept for the most important day of their life. Then you trigger the resonance cascade (and, with it, an alien invasion), and Gordon's world ends. That's ten minutes of tense, action-free, layered storytelling with quickly-sketched characters, all pushing you towards the Test Chamber, and one helluva start.

## FOR SCIENCE!

Valve own *Half-Life*; it's their sole property and it made them powerful enough for wild experiments like Steam and Steamworks, for experimental games like *Portal*, and for self-indulgent freebies like Alien Swarm. Steam has helped small developers thrive in a world of cutthroat mega-publishers and has become as essential to PC gaming as Xbox Live is to Xbox owners. Valve give technology away for free, innovate both in software and hardware, and won't put a game out until it's absolutely polished to perfection. If they finally enter the console market they'll have an insurmountable advantage – incredible software, incredible hardware, genuine goodwill from the gaming community, and, of course, *Half-Life 3*.

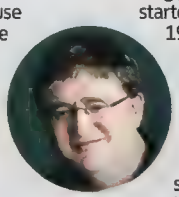
*Half-Life* may have been absent for five years, but Valve won't be resting on their laurels. With *Episodes One* and *Two*, they pushed the technology of the time as far as they could; if they've been waiting this long to release the final, promised *Episode Three*, it's because they've been waiting for a killer twist, to finish the series on a high. That's a story we all want to hear told. ■

**"With no self-imposed limits on their ambition, Valve keep tinkering until it's perfect"**

### Origins

**"Half-Life in many ways was a response to the trivialisation of the first person genre"**

***Gabe Newell > Managing director > Valve***

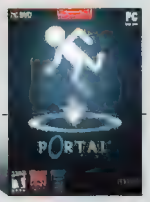


"Many of us had fallen in love with videogames because of the possibilities of the field, and felt the industry was reducing the experiences to common denominators." says Gabe. "Our hope was that building worlds and characters would be more compelling than building shooting galleries." When Valve started work on *Half-Life* in 1996, part of their impetus was that the FPS was totally stagnant. Choosing to revamp the genre with a horror-themed action game, they struggled to find a publisher until Sierra On-Line signed them up.

**EPISODE 2**
PC > 2007

Alyx and Gordon continue their journey to a rebel base, where they activate a satellite that blocks the Combine from calling reinforcements.

**PORTAL**
PC > 2007



A departure for the series, in an entirely new setting. Funny, challenging, technically innovative and whimsical. A true one-off.

**PORTAL 2**
PC 360, PS3, MAC > 2011

The sequel to a one-off. Even funnier, with the vocal talents of Steven Merchant taking the part of idiot AI Wheatley.

# What can we expect from Skyrim DLC?

We read the runes to uncover the truth about the next **Elder Scrolls** expansion

A single image and one word: 'Dawnguard'. That's all we have to go on so far as we try to work out what the first piece of *Skyrim* DLC will contain. Officially, that is. Unofficially, though, it's a different matter. Scrutinise quotes from executive producer and game director Todd Howard, delve into the analyses of frantic forum postings and root around in hidden PC patch file folders, and you'll find a tantalising trove of hints. Could it be that the signs are all there and we just need to read the runes? Very possibly.

First, what do we absolutely know (apart from the fact that there'll be 30 days of Xbox 360 exclusivity, and it will most likely add more Kinect options in the Microsoft version)? Bethesda have gone on record as saying the DLC will contain "new quests, locations, features, and much more" which, to be honest, is sort of the point. More helpfully, Todd Howard has also talked about "ways to make the game better" while saying the content will have "a lot of meat" and be "more like expansion packs".

What that means is that we can anticipate something more substantial than *Oblivion* extras such as Orrery, Thieves Den or Vile Lair. These basically consisted

> *"No horse armour, but a substantial plotted quest full of new areas and extra gameplay"*

^ Well he's a guard and it looks like dawn... Nah, too easy

v Forget bound bows, you'll get a crossbow in this DLC

of rooms to be furnished. (Think an Ikea shopping run, only with dwarven artifacts and blood fountains instead of tealights and paper lampshades.) Most importantly, it means no bloody horse armour. Instead, *Skyrim*'s DLC is heading more towards Shivering Isle territory. This *Oblivion* expansion is a substantial, plotted quest full of new areas, side missions and a hefty whack of extra gameplay.

The single Dawnguard image released has stoked discussion. It features everyone's favourite dovahkiin sporting glowing pale orange eyes, with the title 'Dawnguard' stamped across the image. Many have drawn a connection between this name and the Mythic Dawn cult – the main bad guys in *Oblivion*, who worship Mehrunes Dagon and try to bring about the apocalypse.

There's a slim chance of this guess being proved right, given that Mythic

Dawn do appear in *Skyrim* as part of a sidequest called Pieces Of The Past. This sees you working for a descendant of the cult, searching for bits of a magical knife called Mehrunes Dagger. On the other hand, that seems like rather a lot to read into just one word. Besides, the cult has a well documented history in the lore of the series, and there's been no mention of an elite guard or special group so far – discounting the idea that the Dawnguard are some sort of super-cultist faction. And anyway, Mehrunes Dagon is so associated with *Oblivion*, it would surely be backtracking to use him again.

Another cluster of theories focus on the dovahkiin's glowing eyes. The bulk of these hold that the DLC will be vampire related, with the Dawnguard name referring either to a group of vampires or a group of vampire killers. The only trouble with this is that in *Skyrim* vampire eyes are deep red rather than pale orange, and they don't really glow.

They're also useless. In *Oblivion* ramping up your undead abilities by not feeding meant a huge increase in power. The worst side effect of maxing out the teeth and pale skin was that people stopped talking to you. In *Skyrim* not only are the buffs less obvious but when you reach top level vamp status everyone attacks you on sight, making it impossible to go anywhere or feed to change back. Not the greatest start for DLC.

## WHERE DID ALL THE SNOW ELVES GO?

They're one of the *Elder Scrolls*' oldest races, but the Snow Elves have a bad track record for tolerance. Thousands of years before *Skyrim*, the Snow Elves went on a cull of the growing human population. In retaliation, the Nords all but eradicated the Elves. According to legend, their leader, the Snow Prince, was slain by a child who had witnessed the murder of her mother. The Elves that remained were driven below ground and poisoned by the Dwemer, eventually degenerating into the blind and vicious Falmer.

## RISING VAMPS

However, there is some support for the vampire theory in the shape of a something hidden in a recent PC patch. Inside a folder called DLC1 are three animation files called Paired_VampFeedBack, Paired_VampFeedFront and IdleMesmerizes. These tie into a section of a video called Game Jam, showed by Bethesda at this year's DICE Summit. It revealed the results of various development experiments created when the team were given a week off to make whatever they wanted.

Some Game Jam content has already made its way into *Skyrim* in the shape of the Kinect shouts, improved underwater visuals and kill cams. Among the features not yet added to the game, however, is a brief clip showing a vampire

v One thing you won't be getting is more dragons after you kind of killed them all

feeding on a standing victim (currently you can only feed on sleeping people). It seems to match the names of those animation files and suggests the new way of drinking blood will be added in an upcoming patch. Also in the DLC1 folder are a range of animation files for a crossbow, suggesting that too could be patched in.

But (and it's a Sir Mix-a-Lot sized big but) it's the other contents of that DLC1 folder that are of the most interest. It contains plenty of evidence pointing towards a very real answer as to what's in the DLC. There are several files relating to a 'SnowElfPrince'. He might sound familiar: he's the huge statue you encounter during a Thieves Guild mission in which you steal the Eyes Of The Falmer. Now, in *Skyrim* lore, the Falmer are twisted descendants of the lost Snow Elf race, and these jewels are also known as the Eyes Of The Snow Elves. These eyes? They glow.

Where it gets really exciting is that the remains of the Snow Elf Prince are buried in Morrowind. Technically that's a whole other country (and the setting for *The Elder Scrolls III*) but there's a stonking great gate in Skyrim that leads off in that direction. Only it's blocked off by an invisible wall. Almost as it you're not meant to go that way. Yet.

Then there's the last batch of mystery files in the DLC1 folder. These appear to be a series of animations for someone, or something, called 'RF'. There are characteristics such as 'guarded', 'playful' and 'serious' and it sounds like something you'll be spending a lot of time interacting with. Like, say, a companion. And the fact that it clearly isn't covered by the animations already in the game suggests it's a new thing.

^ Expect new spells and weapons for the Dawnguard DLC too.

## FORECAST: SNOW

One suggestion has been that 'RF' stands for "Reikling Follower". What's that you ask? It's a kind of Falmer, another Snow Elf descendant that last appeared in – wait for it – a *Morrowind* expansion. The theory is that the Snow Prince rises and calls you to Morrowind (adding new areas to explore) and sends you off on missions with a stumpy acolyte.

While it's mainly conjecture, it does seem odd that prominent Snow Elf lore, books and history run through *Skyrim* for no obvious purpose – almost as if you were being prepareded for their appearance. True, the Dwemer are there too – but they always have been, and their mysterious disappearance is thoroughly woven into *Elder Scrolls* law (such that bringing them back would be a canon-strainingly big deal). The Snow Elves, on the other hand have only been mentioned in passing, making them the perfect peg for a new tranche of story.

***"Snow Elf lore runs rife in Skyrim, almost as if you were being prepped for their appearance"***

Add together the contents of the the DLC1 folder, the glowing eyes of the Snow Elf Prince statue, and the fact that Skyrim books talk of the Snow Elves' return, and mention the Falmer getting restless and venturing above ground. Finally, remember that huge impassable gate leading to Morrowind, where the prince lies waiting. We know what we think: if the DLC doesn't involve you helping the dead race return, then we'll eat our viking helmet, horns and all. ■

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XBOX 360 / KINECT / LIVE / DLC

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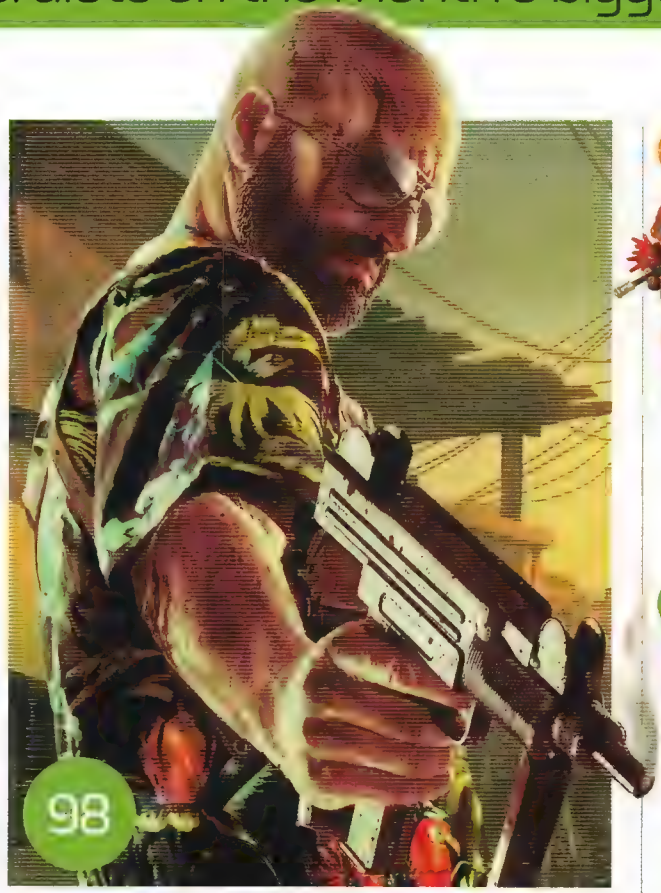
115 THE WALKING DEAD EP1: A NEW DAY

115 BLOODFORGE

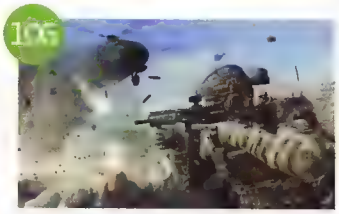




**"IT'S THE POLISH AND PRODUCTION VALUES THAT MAKE MAX PAYNE 3 WELL WORTH PLAYING"**

Captures the spirit of the comics, but does **THE WALKING DEAD** stand up as a game? Find out in our review

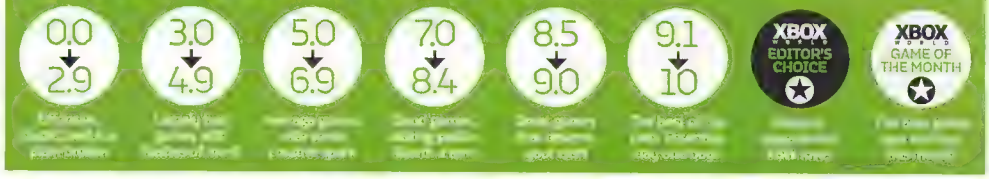
Four-player hack and slasher **FABLE HEROES** storms on to XBLA. But has the magic gone?

With zero rally, but more 'duuuuude' how does **DIRT SHOWDOWN** hold up? Very well, actually




A bold new direction for **GHOST RECON** makes this tactical shooter feel cutting edge again

### HOW OUR SCORING SYSTEM WORKS

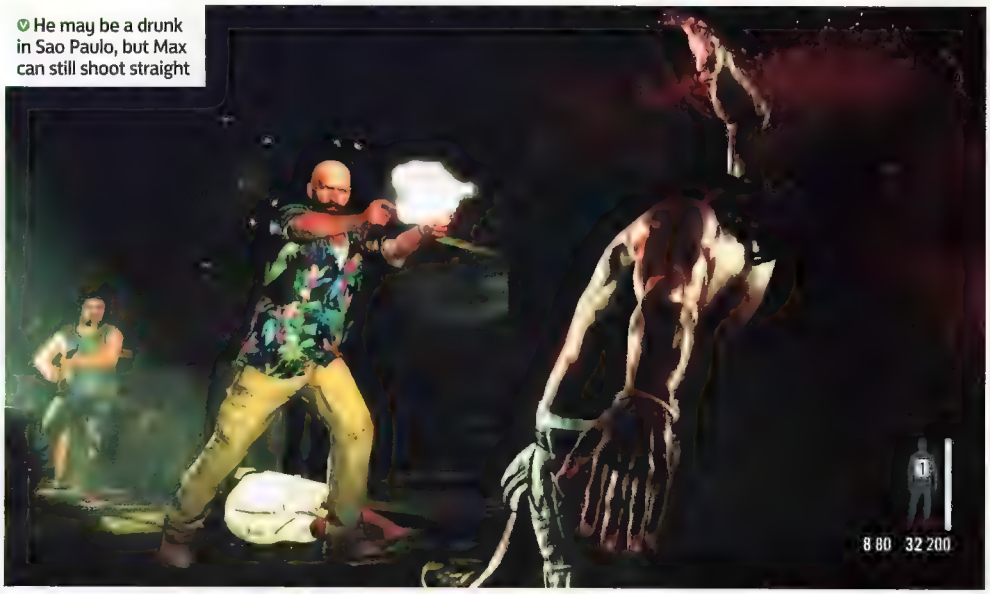


# MAX PAYNE 3

## A brutal but flawed reinvention

Reviewer
Andy Kelly

**DETAILS** **Publisher** > Rockstar **Developer** > Rockstar **Release** > Out now **Price** > £49.99




He may be a drunk in Sao Paulo, but Max can still shoot straight

By the time we'd finished *Max Payne 3*, we'd killed over 1,400 people. From start to finish, the game is a violent tornado of death and destruction, and one of the bloodiest, most relentless shooters ever. It has all the cinematic flair, polish and production values you might expect from a Rockstar game – but it's missing some of the surreal magic that made the original games so memorable.

Set eight years after *Max Payne 2*, our haunted ex-cop is now working as a private security contractor for a wealthy family in São Paulo. He's an emotional wreck, spending his downtime popping painkillers and soaking in whisky. But when his employer's daughter is kidnapped, he's forced back into action, shooting, leaping and metaphor-ing his way through the darkest corners of Brazil's criminal underworld.

> ***"There are glimmers of humour, but it's always incredibly black"***

It's a bleak game, reflecting Max's battered psyche. There are glimmers of humour, but it's always incredibly black. Even though the setting has changed from the gloomy back alleys of New York City to the sun-bleached streets of São Paulo, it's still noir; a genre that goes beyond fedora-wearing private dicks and blinking neon signs.

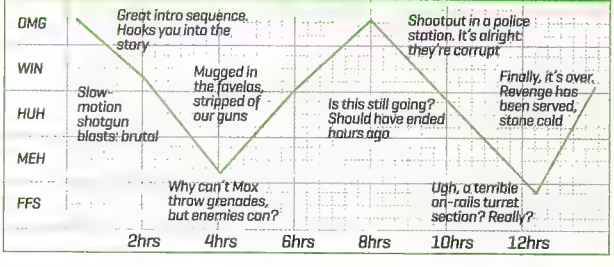
## HERO PIE
OUR MAN DISSECTED

## FAST LANE

There's a palpable sense of movement. You're always racing from one environment to the next, and the scenery changes frequently. You'll blast your way through a nightclub, a football stadium, city rooftops, the Panama Canal, and, of course, Brazil's famous favelas. The pace is breakneck, and the jerky, faux-documentary camerawork in the cutscenes – as well as an impressive lack of any loading breaks whatsoever – gives the game a great feeling of acceleration and urgency.

It's just a shame that it wrestles the controls away from you so often. There are a *lot* of cutscenes, and they can be immensely distracting. Even something as simple as moving from one room to another or commenting on something in the environment is shown as a cinematic, when it could have easily been presented in-game. The constant snapping between short bursts of gameplay and

**THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF... Max Payne 3**



Environments are rich and full of detail, but feel like fake, hollow stage sets. Shame

long cutscenes really hampers your sense of interaction, and sometimes you feel as though you're only actually playing half the game.

But let's talk about the combat. After Max himself, it's the thing that defines the series. When the first *Max Payne* introduced bullet time to videogames in 2001 it wasn't quite so ubiquitous, but even now it's still massively entertaining watching a goon smash through a glass window or tumble down a set of stairs.

Clicking the right stick slows down time during combat, allowing you to make precise headshots while moving. Hitting RB sends you into Max's trademark shoot-dodge, during which you can hit B to snap between enemies and take entire groups out in one fell swoop. It's true to the originals, and simple to execute, with only a generous meter – filled by killing enemies – to stop you overusing it.

The Euphoria physics engine has come a long way since *Grand Theft Auto IV*, and bodies react to every bullet with brutal realism. They don't just fall into piles of jellied limbs; they stumble, recoil and crease over like real people, staggering into scenery and slumping to the floor. Whenever

## ACHIEVEMENT GALLERY

**Fear Of Losing It** 20G
Survive A Level Without Painkillers

**License To Kill'** 40G
Collect all the golden guns

**Maximum Payne** 80G
Finish in Old School mode

you kill the last guy in a room, you're treated to a macabre slow-motion close-up of their death, which you can slow down even more by holding A. You can even keep firing long after he's dead, peppering his lifeless corpse with lead before he hits the deck.

## TIME TO DIE

But as much fun as the gunplay is, the game is way too long. The action is incredibly one-note and isn't rich or nuanced enough to justify the 10-12 hour running time. We don't mind a long game, but only if there's enough variety to keep us engaged. A few hours before the end, fatigue sets in, and you feel as if you're going through the motions. It's also punishingly difficult, and you'll often die suddenly and without warning. In the final levels, we had to set the game to easy. It had ceased to be challenging, becoming instead utterly merciless, and not much fun.

Environment interaction would have made the action more dynamic. There are a few examples of this – dropping buses on enemies' heads in a garage, shooting out the ceiling above an enemy to drop an air conditioner on his head – but mostly, it's just straight-up shooting. Visually, the level of detail in every locale is insane, and the world looks authentic and lived-in. But this superficial realism only barely masks the fact that, from a gameplay standpoint, it's little more than a series of static movie sets.

Oddly, despite the game's bold change of setting and atmosphere, it's the New York flashback levels that offer some

## MULTIPLAYER TEST

**There's a massive multiplayer mode in *Max Payne 3* that ties into the story. Here's what we think after five hours**

In *Max Payne 3*'s world, rival factions are battling it out in Brazil, from gangs to military police units. This war rages around Max in the single-player story, but in multiplayer, you experience it first-hand. There are the usual standard modes like deathmatch and team deathmatch, but it's Payne Killer and Gang Wars that really stand out.

In Payne Killer, one player becomes Max Payne, and another becomes his buddy from the story, Passos. Both these players have better weapons, longer bullet time and the ability to use painkillers – but are shown on the HUD. It's the other players' job to take them down and become Payne or Passos themselves. It's loads of fun.

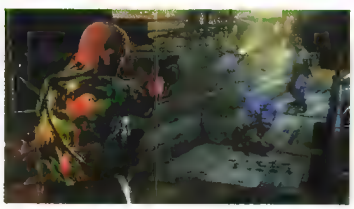
Gang Wars is a series of quick-fire objective-based games, like capturing a bag, last man standing or taking over areas of the map. They all take place on the same map, and a score is tallied up at the end. The fast pace and tactical team-based objectives make this our favourite mode.

How does bullet time work online? When you use it while aiming at another player, their game slows too, but other players on the map see you both moving at normal speed. Some technical wizardry makes this possible, and it works really well.

**Rating** ●●●●●

Sliding over cover and pulling off slow-mo kills feels good, but it's Max's only cool trick

The violence is as slick as ever, by Max has lost some of that surreal humour



of *Max Payne*'s most entertaining setpieces. A shootout in a graveyard swarming with angry mafia goons is tight and fast-paced; a chase across the rooftops of Hoboken is a thrill, with blind corners and close-quarters gunfights. There are some superb scenes in Brazil too, of course.

there was a surreal edge and a tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. Max's tortured film noir metaphors were intentionally overwrought, and there were moments of brilliant insanity, like the trip through the Address Unknown amusement park. Rockstar's *Max* has none of this.

***"Why so serious, though? This Max Payne is a straight tale of revenge and conspiracy"***

A battle through a police station towards the end recalls The Terminator, and a skirmish in a plush, glass-filled office is a glorious explosion of scenery-shredding destruction.

Why so serious, though? Remedy's *Max Payne* games were moody and hard-boiled, sure, but they've stripped away all the subversive humour, and it has very little charm as a result. The first two games had hints of the supernatural and the mythic, and a dreamlike apocalyptic tone. All that's been removed in favour of a straight tale of revenge and conspiracy.

**BEST BIT**

*Scoring the perfect bullet time kill-cam, and seeing an enemy smashing through a window in gruesome slow-motion*

**WORST BIT**

*Running out of ammo and having no choice but to wade into the line of fire to pick up a fallen enemy's weapon*

### WHAT'S THE STORY?

*"Max is at his lowest point, when an old pal invites him to Brazil to protect a wealthy businessman. He refuses, but after a run-in with a local mob boss he's forced to flee the country. In São Paulo, his employer's daughter is kidnapped by a gang, and Max gives chase"*

It's the polish and production values that make this worth playing. It only does one thing, but it does it extremely well – at least for the first three quarters of the game. Even though they're often distracting, the cutscenes are expertly directed and acted – as you might expect from Rockstar – and the brooding, ethereal score by noise-rock band Health is spectacular. Those who loved the oddball, fourth wall-shattering humour of the earlier games will feel its absence here, but there are enough references thrown in to keep us sweet – the classic theme tune, James McCaffrey's gravelly narration, the familiar ugly tie. *Max Payne 3* is undeniably a quality shooter. Just don't expect any great depth or variety, and prepare for a long haul. ■

### VERDICT

**A fast-paced and violent shooter with Rockstar's trademark style and panache, marred only by a lack of variety in tone and content, and an overlong story**

**8.0**

Reviewer Richard McCormick

Sniper Elite V2

**DETAILS** **Publisher** > 505 Games **Developer** > Rebellion **Release** > Out Now **Price** > £39.99

Karl isn't restricted to his rifle. He's got an SMG as standard, and can use heavy weapons

# SNIPER ELITE V2

## It's got guts, but can it do gameplay?

**BEST PRICE**
**£28.35**
at Amazon.com

Catching sight of a [illegible] your bullet's angle, and [illegible]

**BEST BIT WORST BIT**

Spending an hour hiding bodies and timing shots, only to be spotted from half a kilometre away by some chump who tells all his friends

Turns out there's only so many times you can watch a man's skull get cracked open by a sniper bullet in lavish slow-motion. Only so many times you'll tolerate *Sniper Elite V2*'s glorification of pinpoint murder, only so many times you can observe the grisly effects of your aiming and clicking before you tire of arterial spray and gobs of brain matter. In one sitting of *Sniper Elite V2*, that limit is about 20.

The first shot is mesmerising. An accurate, long-range round fired from one of *Sniper Elite V2*'s period-accurate rifles by American behind-enemy-lines Karl Fairburne, causes *Sniper Elite V2* to whisk the camera away from the game's standard third-person view to follow the bullet's trajectory. The camera pans as the round spirals through the air, near-silent until it thunks into skin, through bone and into brain. Your bullet enters your target's face pristine, and comes out mangled, tumbling away as dented and ruined as the wrecked skull it leaves behind.

***"Watching your first victim die in X-ray vision is fun"***

Watching your first victim die in X-ray vision is fun.

With your fifth shot, you start to get a feel for your rifle. *Sniper Elite V2* is set at the end of World War 2, but a World War 2 on a parallel Earth where gravity is six times the norm. Bullets drop almost as soon as they leave your gun, meaning shots over distance – the standard for a game about sniping – need to be aimed over the target. On harder difficulties, bullet drop is more significant; on lower, it's less of a factor. With a lungful of air and a low heart rate, Karl can slow time for a moment, also giving you a helpful red indicator of where your bullet will fall. Get it right first time and you're treated to another mini-scene of carnage, your victim's eye bursting and nose shattering as the bullet enters his head.

Tenth shot, and you've alerted half the level to your presence. *Sniper Elite V2* tries to reward sneakery, and hyper-careful players can pick off targets one by one until whole sections of the multi-stage maps are cleared. Most levels have environmental

## THE FOUR NASTIEST KILLS IN SNIPER ELITE V2

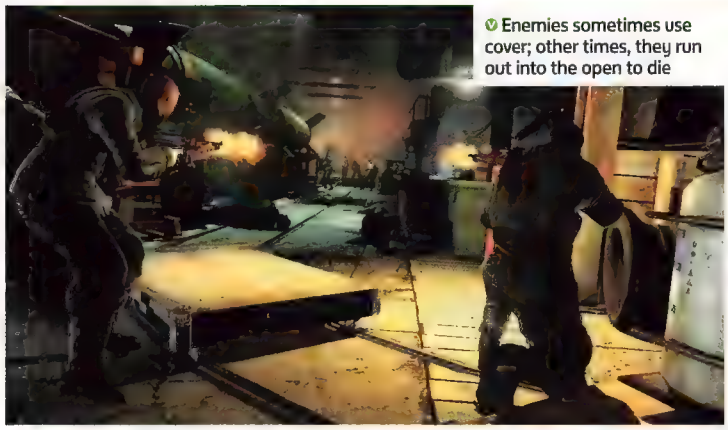
Your sickening rewards for the game's perfect hillshots

**1 Shot through the heart**
Hit a soldier in the chest and the bullet bounces around inside their vitals, ripping them up. Most vital of said vitals is the heart: perforate this and the game rewards you with a meaty, squishing noise – something like plunging the pointy end of a claw hammer into a side of beef. Urgh.

**2 Fingering practice**
A shot along the body of another sniper's rifle will likely whip off a few fingers. They make the sound of cracking twigs as they're separated from hands and scattered to the winds, the kind of sound that makes someone involuntarily bair their own digits into a fist and vow to never lose them.

**3 Eye'll be damned**
Lance a shot through a soldier's face and you might see their eyeballs burst in super-duper slow motion. Best to keep a bucket somewhere near your telly, for ease of puking should you manage this shot.

**4 Testicular fortitude**
Crotch shots are Sniper Elite's moneymakers, but they're surprisingly difficult to pull off (no sniggering back there). Aim just above a man's genital region and you might ruin his giggleberries with a bullet. Should the males among you manage the shot, be prepared to sharply inhale breath.



Enemies sometimes use cover; other times, they run out into the open to die

Elevated sniper positions provide the game's most fun shooting galleries

effects to cover the bang of a rifle discharge – bells, bombs, and rocket launches are signified by a sound indicator in the top right of the screen – and the standard loadout includes a silenced Welrod pistol for close range kills. But the sheer number of guards makes spotting all of your potential targets hugely difficult. Executing each one individually requires hours of planning: pointless when it's simpler to make a loud noise, then hide behind a box to plug away at alert enemies.

### ALL OUT OF AMMO

On your fifteenth shot, you're flagging. Some of *Sniper Elite V2*'s checkpoints are terribly spaced. One mission asks you to make your way to a church, plonking two tanks and a small army of soldiers in your way. Picking your way through without being seen requires the patience of a particularly patient saint. Guards flip from unaware to totally alert in miliseconds. There's a small semicircle that appears to notify you of enemies looking your way, but they can spot you behind cover and give no opportunity to reverse your misstep. Magically every enemy in the area knows your exact location. Stay hidden and your foes will keep shooting at your previous hiding spot – indicated by a wispy white ghost of your form – but the levels are too straightforward to allow serious flanking manoeuvres.

It's easier to stay in one spot and let the fuddled AI sprint into the open. Sometimes they get stuck: tank carcasses cause particular problems, but do let you line up perfect angles. Shot 20, fired at a clump of Russian troops running endlessly into the destroyed shell of a T34 tank, rips through two torsos. *Sniper Elite V2*'s shots win on distance, accuracy and destruction, but though a quarter-kilometre headshot feels nice, it's not worth grinding through the lengthy levels over and over to perfect it.

At that twentieth shot, you realise the wooshy camera and vicious bullet physics mask a basic simplicity. The levels are too linear, your targets too dumb to make the game truly thrilling without the regular anatomical destruction. When even that pales, there's not much left. ■

### WHAT'S THE STORY?

*"World War 2. You might've heard of it. Specifically, the end of World War 2. You're Karl Fairburne, super-sniper, dropped behind enemy lines with a rifle and a hankering to ruin Hitler's day. The war's drawing to a close, and Karl's rifling through the ruins of Germany's broken centre. As a lone agent, he's got to dodge both Russian and Nazi kill-teams, all on his tod."*

### VERDICT

The truly patient may find satisfaction in meticulous planning, but it's too easy for those plans to go wrong. When they do, this is just a simplistic shooter

6.3

Reviewer
Alex Dale

DETAILS **Publisher** > Codemasters **Developer** > Codemasters Racing **Release** > Now **Price** > £39.99

Dirt does smashing well, and it's the best bit of the game. For us, Hoonigan is a bit fiddly

# DIRT: SHOWDOWN

## The most chaotic racer on four (er, make that three) wheels

**OR TRY THIS...**

**DIRT 3**
*"More 'Wah-hey!' than McRae – a celebration of all things rallying"*

Let's get something clear: this is not *Dirt 4*. *Dirt 4* is coming – Codemasters have said as much to our faces – but this is not it. So that rather begs the question: what exactly *is Dirt: Showdown*?

Well, it's no Dirt 3.5 either. Instead, *Showdown* is the fix to a racing series that's become conflicted in recent years. Should *Dirt* stay true to its rally sim roots, or embrace the garish redneck excess which brought it so much commercial success with *Dirt 2* and *3*? By splitting their flagship series into two, Codemasters have enabled it to do both. So while *Dirt 4* will concentrate on recapturing the pure rallying of the *Colin McRae* days, this off-road off-shoot gives *Dirt*'s louder side a home.

It's going to prove an inspired decision for fans of either persuasion. Freed from the shackles of its simulation heritage, *Showdown* is a game liberated – free to drape itself in neon like a chavvy peacock and revel in obnoxiousness. And boy does it revel. If there's a jump that can't be celebrated by a plume of fireworks, *Showdown* won't attempt it. If there's a collision that can't be soundtracked by an announcer screaming 'perpendicular awesomeness!', then *Showdown* will leave it on the cutting room floor. Even the palpitating menu screen had us scrambling for the vomit bag. It's the loudest, brightest, most in-your-face racer we've played in some time, and the on-track action matches the presentation.

***"Even the menu screen had us scrambling for the vomit bag"***

There's no room for anything as genteel as rallying on *Showdown*'s itinerary. Each of the four initial championships are comprised of rugged off-road activities. These range from straight forward races to demolition derbies to stunt-based high-score challenges. The latter brings to mind the Gymkhana events from *Dirt 3* and, as you'd expect, the renewed focus means Codemasters have the breathing space to properly expand the formula.

Racing against the clock is a recurring theme in the various Gymkhana challenges, but the similarities end there. While the

## CATCH THE RACENET

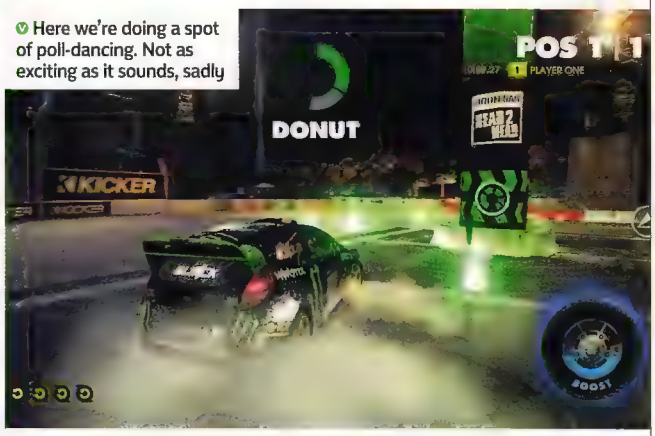
Fresh weekly challenges spice up *Showdown*'s online offering, and Racenet tracks your stats across all Codies' racers

**RaceNet** – Codemasters' equivalent to rival game hubs such as EA's Autolog – makes its debut in *Dirt: Showdown* and will be compatible with all future Codemasters racing games to come. It's free, optional and offers structure and continuity to a game which otherwise would rapidly lose its online lustre. Although, for obvious reasons, we were only able to test out a pre-release version of the game, the idea is that RaceNet will offer fresh challenges every week, with in-game and real-world prizes up for grabs. Events which revolve around score-chasing, such as Marked Man and Hoonigan, are natural fits for the service.

In theory, *Dirt: Showdown* makes for a tremendous online experience – Demolition Derbies should be spectacular – but we wonder how well the 'crash, bang, wallop' nature of the races will translate once it's let loose on the wilds of Xbox Live. It's just an educated guess on our part, but we reckon races will inevitably be populated bad eggs who are more interested in watching the world burn than racing fairly. Stick to private games with your friends however, and this will be an online experience to cherish.

Rating ★★★★★

Once this is over, there's a tedious mini-game where you struggle to renew your insurance




Here we're doing a spot of poll-dancing. Not as exciting as it sounds, sadly

'Hoonigan' stages ask you to throw yourself around a tightly-constructed obstacle course, Trick Rush turns the tables by opening up an entire playground and asking you to find your own route to high-score nirvana. The final mode, Smash Attack, marries freedom with precision. Here, you have to knock down multiple-coloured barriers in groups of five, but while there's room for improvisation, only a perfect run across the optimal route will see you trouble the business end of the leaderboards.

### TURNING POINT

While the generous progression system means you're unlikely to hit an impasse, it can be tough to nail first place in the Gymkhana-themed stages, and that's largely attributable to the typically 'heavy' Codemasters steering. For us the cars feel too weighty to enjoy performing nimble car gymnastics in, but fortunately the burly handling is far more coherent during race sessions.

On race days, collisions aren't so much something to be avoided as they are a way of life – particularly in the superbly chaotic '8-Ball' sessions, where the tracks loop back on themselves meaning that a colossal crash is rarely far away. Through sheer dint of mayhem the races are entertaining and competitive right to the finish, although the number of unforced errors that are programmed into the CPU drivers serves as an unwritten confession from the designers that, yes, all that paint-trading does give the races a somewhat random quality.

A health bar coerces you into racing clean, but *Dirt*'s best asset is plainly the meaty, satisfying crunch of car-on-car, so why race against the tide? As such, the greatest part of *Showdown*'s package are the arena-based demolition derby events, where there's literally nothing on the menu but crashes. Points double during the last 25 seconds of play, so there's a tremendous sense of escalation, with the entire field skulking around for the winning shunt right up until the whistle.

Variety of content has always been the *Dirt* series' calling card, and this remains so despite *Dirt: Showdown*'s narrower field of focus. This adrenaline-drenched racer truly has something for everyone – except, perhaps, rallying fans. But even they, soon enough, will be grateful for *Dirt: Showdown*'s showboating. ■

### VERDICT

*Showdown* doesn't quite have the bite to back up its bark, but it comes close. Look past some of the randomness and you'll find hours of racing entertainment

**7.8**

### ACHIEVEMENT GALLERY

**Don't Push Me x 10G**
Get the First Blood bonus in Knockout

**Hoonzilla x 30G**
Complete the Yokohama arena to 100%

**Max Power x 50G**
Get this by fully upgrading all vehicles.

The 'Marked Man' events, where seven other racers attempt you out of existence as quickly as possible

**BEST BIT**

**WORST BIT**

We weren't fans of Joyride. Think Burnout Paradise's hub world, but flat, fiddly and single-player only. Utterly pointless

Reviewer
Andy Hartup

# TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON FUTURE SOLDIER

## Classic Clancy with a spec ops twist

**DETAILS** **Publisher** > Ubisoft **Developer** > Ubisoft Paris **Release** > Out now **Price** > £40

We love the way cover comes apart realistically as it's battered by bullets

From *Splinter Cell*, to *Rainbow Six*, to *Ghost Recon* and even *EndWar* – all Clancy games share the same DNA. Yes, obviously, they're all about shooting men in the face from various distances, and saving the planet from dastardly terrorist groups (usually based in Russia), but one thing that often gets overlooked is that they're all world leaders in making you feel like an absolute badass. *Future Soldier* is no exception – no other game does spec ops as confidently or convincingly. However, in doing so, it treads a little too hard on *Splinter Cell*'s toes, giving you a slight sense that you've played this game before...

> ***"A world leader in making you feel like an absolute badass"***

Where do you stand on *Splinter Cell Conviction*? Some loved it, others not so much. If you're in the *Conviction* fan club you'll enjoy the direction Ubisoft are taking *Ghost Recon* in. Crudely, *Future Soldier* is all about arriving in an area full of bad guys, scouting them out, picking off as many as you can without raising the alarm, and finishing the rest off with the largest gun you can carry. It's *Conviction*'s aggressive stealth on a larger scale, with more men to kill and more allies to murder them with. Winner.

Those who bemoaned *Splinter Cell*'s move away from more traditional stealth will have similar problems with *GRFS*. Everything has been streamlined – from targeting to your use of gadgets – and although that makes the game more accessible, it cuts down on the hardcore factor. You don't have to struggle to be good at *Future Soldier*, and while that's a good thing through 90% of the game, you feel a little spoon-fed for the other 10%. And some people love a challenge...

## YES, RUSSIAN

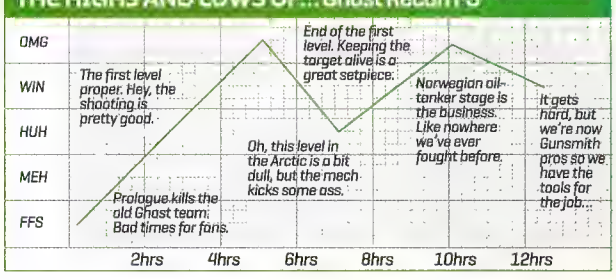
What remains constant from *GRAW* to *GRFS* (acronyms FTW) is the Clancy-ness; that uber-military styling so many shooters have since adopted. It almost feels self-parody now, requiring a Masters in Oscar-Mike-ology from the University of 30 Clicks Northwest to keep up. As far as we can tell, bad people are trying to occupy Moscow, except it isn't the Russians because the Cold War is over. It's ultranationalists; and just like Nazis, zombies and aliens, you can shoot ultranationalists all day without upsetting anyone. Phew.

Although the plot is near-unintelligible, it does have you hopping the globe to a variety of regions you don't often get to ruin in shooters. The Nigerian desert, an oil-tanker in the Norwegian Sea, a traffic jam in Peshawar – these are all unusual and spectacular places you'll visit during the campaign. The simple fact that you're *not* crawling down Fifth Avenue yawning as the Chrysler building explodes makes *Future Soldier* feel a little different. Each stage looks decent enough, and what they lack in visual polish, they make up for in massive scale. Stages can last for up to an hour at a time and

### GAME DNA
INFLUENCES REVEALED

20% *Gears of War*
50% *Splinter Cell*
30% *Classic Ghost Recon*

### THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF... Ghost Recon FS



This mission asks you to shoot down that plane before it takes off. Do it

**MULTIPLAYER VERDICT**

*"You should play this game in co-op. Although your AI buddies are razor-sharp, and never get spotted or miss a target, every scenario is enhanced by buddies. We suggest prioritising this over the Guerrilla (horde) mode and the regular online. They're both fine, by the way, but don't combine the best elements of the game in the same way the co-op campaign does"*

they're filled with opportunities to get creative when you're picking off bad-guys.

## MOVE SOLDIER!

As we alluded to before, *Future Soldier* makes you feel like King Gun. There's a smoothness to the movement of your soldier thanks to real spec ops hardcase mo-capping and consultation, and it genuinely makes a difference in combat. From opening doors and clearing rooms, to sprinting from cover to cover in open battle, this game feels right. Headshots are brutal, weapons handle genuinely differently when you tinker with them in Gunsmith, and scenery falls apart as you riddle it with bullets. What's more, the tactical side is well implemented and finely balanced. Early levels teach the basics of commanding teammates to take simultaneous shots (you can tag up to four enemies at once before giving the kill order, in some cases completely clearing that area of hostiles), while later stages ask you to consider how many you can pick off quietly – swinging a firefight in your favour – before setting off the alarm. Get it right and you can clear whole levels without ever being spotted.

***"From clearing rooms to sprinting between cover in battle, this game feels right"***

Where *Future Soldier*'s combat occasionally falls down is pacing. Some stages drag on a little too long, while others stumble when on-rails sections rear their ugly head. Shooting a minigun from a helicopter feels played out, and it doesn't help that in *GRFS* the on-rails guns are far twitchier than the rest of the weaponry. They're disturbing disconnects (in terms of ethos and action) from otherwise polished shooting scenarios. The only thing to recommend them is that they're mercifully scarce.

## BUILD-A-BERRETTA

What feels oh-so-right about *Ghost Recon* is Gunsmith. One of the most in-depth weapon customisation systems in any game, Gunsmith lets you fiddle with every part of your chosen weapon. Muzzle, barrel, stock,

## HOW TO MAKE AN INCREDIBLE WEAPON IN GUNSMITH

The Xbox World guide to creating the ultimate rifles and secondaries

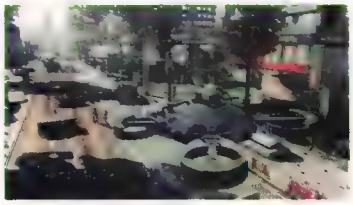
**1 Balance**
Sorry to get all zen on you, but it makes sense to have a balanced loadout on each level. All missions have ranged combat as well as closer, silent skirmishes, so always carry a scoped rifle and a shorter ranged gun with a higher fire-rate. That way, you're always ready for the enemy, no matter where he's standing.

**2 Silence**
Your secondary is usually best for silencing. Our favourite is the P90 with a silenced muzzle, and various parts added to increase the control (if you miss first time, you might as well be blowing a vuvuzela). Don't bother silencing assault rifles, but if you like to snipe, it's smart to make that your quiet weapon.

**3 Power**
The other half of your loadout – usually your primary – should be as powerful as possible. We like the all-round stats of the TAR, with a heart-sensor scope, extended mags, and gun parts that increase power (for shooting through scenery). It's key to *Ghost Recon*'s ability to make you feel like a future badass.

**4 Leftfield**
OK, here are a few alternative loadouts. If you want to pack a shotgun for close-range brutality, make sure you take a silenced assault rifle for ranged combat. And if you pack a sniper, a PDR weapon like the L22A2 is a great companion. Want to pack a heavy MG like the PKP? Take a silenced bullpup rifle too.

▲ At the end of some levels, you'll be asked to survive until you get extracted



magazine, rail, trigger, scope, gas system, paint, under-barrel – you can adjust everything on every weapon in the game (think of it as the *Forza* of guns). And there are plenty of guns too, ranging from rifles (sniper, assault) to shotguns, sidearms and SMGs. Once you're done, you can head to the firing range to test out your new homemade murder device. Amazingly, even the smallest changes can have a big effect on combat, so you really need to pay attention to marrying up your arsenal with your play style. With no reality-busting perks or superhuman powers, there's something refreshing about geeking out over a simple assault rifle and making it your own.

Creating a specialised weapon setup gets even more critical when you head into co-op. You can play the whole campaign with friends, and we recommend doing just that. Providing your friends aren't ballbags. Or Russian ultranationalists. Coordinating synchronised shots requires teamwork, and although you can do it without talking, you'll get better results from discussing strategy. The whole story has been built to give co-op players slightly different roles, and in some levels – like the one set in the Arctic where you control a devastating mech – players will squabble over who gets to play with the best toys.

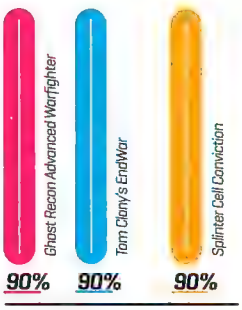
### BACK TO BASICS

There's a horde-style co-op mode too, which doesn't make the most of *GRFS*'s tactical elements, so it's slightly weaker than the co-op campaign. It is tough, though, so will appeal if you're trying to recapture some of that hardcore *Ghost Recon* challenge. Or head online to be routinely murdered by people distinctly more skilful and less employed than you. We can't say how the *Future Soldier* community will develop, but previous games have drawn a fiercely competitive crowd (if a friendlier one than that around younger shooters like *COD*).

In all, *Ghost Recon Future Soldier* is a pleasant surprise. Much like *Splinter Cell Conviction* before it, the gamble of ripping up the initial concept and starting from scratch seems to have paid dividends – good news for the recently 'back to the drawing board' *Rainbow Six Patriots*. The authenticity of the soldier movement and weaponry given to the game by its spec op consultants is a triumph, and it combines with the imaginative locations to create a game that... well, it just makes you feel like a badass. Some may grumble that *Ghost Recon* has dumbed down to grab the *COD* dollar. They're wrong. While thematically similar, this crafted, tactical shooter is a world away from the pop-gun cinema of Activision's arcade shooter, and finds greatness on its own terms. ■

### GAMEOGRAPHY

TOM CLANCY'S LAST THREE SCORES




### VERDICT

A new direction for *Ghost Recon*, but one that brings together spec ops realism with excellent player control and an interesting, globe-hopping story

**8.5**

DETAILS **Publisher** >Rising Star Games **Developer** >Cave
**Release** >Out Now **Price** >£24.95

Bullets, bullets everywhere.

## AKAI KATANA

### Bullet-hell shooter offers little value to anyone but the hardcore

James Bond's faceless, utterly incapable enemies look like crack shots compared to the enemies in *Akai Katana*. They'll shower you with bullets and every single one will miss. They're designed to. Well, if you're a pro bullet-hell player.

People who aren't Rain Man will die considerably more, your pilot's anguished screams becoming the soundtrack. The deadly matter is clearly visible, even in brutally busy moments – like a squadron of barrel-rolling biplanes, or a vast airship launching a thousand pieces of shrapnel – but can feel unfair.

Being trapped between the spokes of a fiery Catherine wheel is a claustrophobic nightmare, and weaving your way through screen-filling attacks demands laser focus, and eyes planted inches from the TV. The game alternates between empowerment (vaporising a dozen tanks) and disempowerment (hiding in a corner hoping foes forgot their homing missiles), but neither is all that compelling.

With a generous helping of smart bombs and a steady stream of gratification (we unlocked 18 Achievements in 20 minutes), beginners can disengage their brain and enjoy decimating ranks of sprites, unlimited lives levelling the playing field as long as you don't mind constantly exploding. The afternoon-long campaign and paltry three different playable characters show that this is clearly aimed at the bullet hell hardcore who'll replay the same level repeatedly. ■

> ***"People who aren't Rain Man will die more"***

**VERDICT**

A decent bullet-hell shooter, but feels like it should have released on XBL for 1200 points rather than £25 in shops

**6.0**

DETAILS **Publisher** >Telltale Games **Developer** >Telltale Games
**Release** >Out Now **Price** >£24.95

## BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE GAME

### Gets everything right except for the gameplay

Seven months. That's how long it took Telltale to release all five episodes of Back To The Future. And now you can buy all five on one disc. This is how episodic content should be: tight nuggets of gameplay and a sprinkle of scenarios linked by an overarching story and separated by a cliffhanger. The format can work.

Too bad the gameplay isn't as strong as the structure. They send Marty McFly (a could've-fooled-me stand-in) and Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd on his sleepiest) spiralling through an American history lesson full of mild peril. But where the films were thrilling capers going at 88mph, here you'll often ask 'Are we there yet?'

Take the second episode, which has you pleading around a prohibition-era Hill Valley hub, the lack of a run button making progress painfully slow. Even faster paced scenes hold up traffic: a sequence dodging Biff Tannen's baseball bat repeats endlessly until he tries himself on a bug zapper. Puzzles that do work – 'give the piano player different songs to open new dialogue options' – are not very BTTF. Remember when Marty dispatched Biff by strolling up to the manure truck and clumsily pressing 'up' while everyone waited patiently? Us neither. But despite being in the wrong genre, it wins a lot of goodwill for its spot-on characters and settings. ■

> ***"An American history lesson full of peril"***

**VERDICT**

Captures everything about the films but their pace. Each [illegible] episode, though, offers undeniable value

**7.5**

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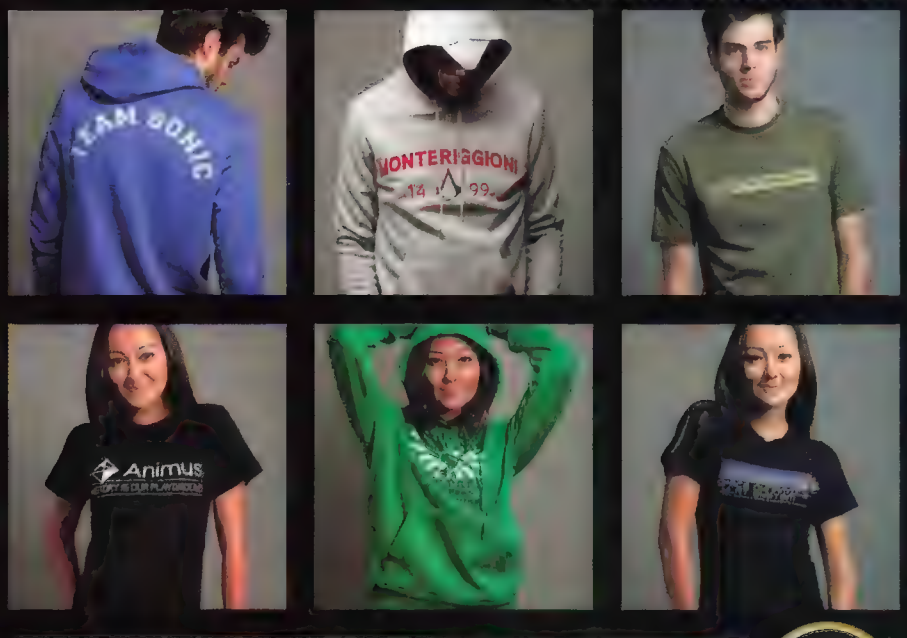


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Reviewer Andy Kelly

DETAILS **Publisher** >Microsoft **Developer** >Mojang **Release** >Out now **Price** >1600 MS Points

Colonise the verdant landscape brick by brick. And duck by duck

# MINECRAFT

## The PC indie smash feels right at home on Xbox 360

*Tunnelling through the earth and finding a cave full of rare materials. The random world is always throwing up surprises*

**BEST BIT**
**WORST BIT**

*Thinking it's safe outside, only to bump into a Creeper and have half your house blown up. The enemies are just merciless*

By day, *Minecraft*'s blocky world is divinely peaceful. Gentle ambient music plays as you explore the surreal, randomly generated landscape, made entirely from square blocks and 8-bit textures. It's during these quiet hours that you gather materials; chopping down trees for wood, digging into the earth to mine stone, killing animals for food. Then you build a shelter – maybe a simple hut or a castle on a mountain peak – because at night, this is a very different place.

When the sun drops behind the horizon, the environment is plunged into darkness and the monsters wake up. Zombies, giant spiders, and skeletons roam the land, attacking you on sight. Even with a full set of armour and a sword – crafted from raw materials, like everything else in *Minecraft* – surviving isn't easy. You're always safer indoors, close to the glow of a torch. They don't like light, you see.

*Minecraft* is a game about creation and survival. When you start a new game, a random world is generated and you're dumped in it with no materials, and no supplies besides a map of the immediate area. Everything has to be built and crafted; from your house, to the tools you use to build it.

> ***"More streamlined and user friendly than the PC version"***

Of course, you can turn the monsters off altogether. The 'peaceful' difficulty setting gives you free reign of the world without having to worry about nightfall, which will suit gamers who'd rather just build stuff than fight giant spiders. But this can seem a little aimless if you have no particular project in mind, and the enemies make it feel more like a 'game'.

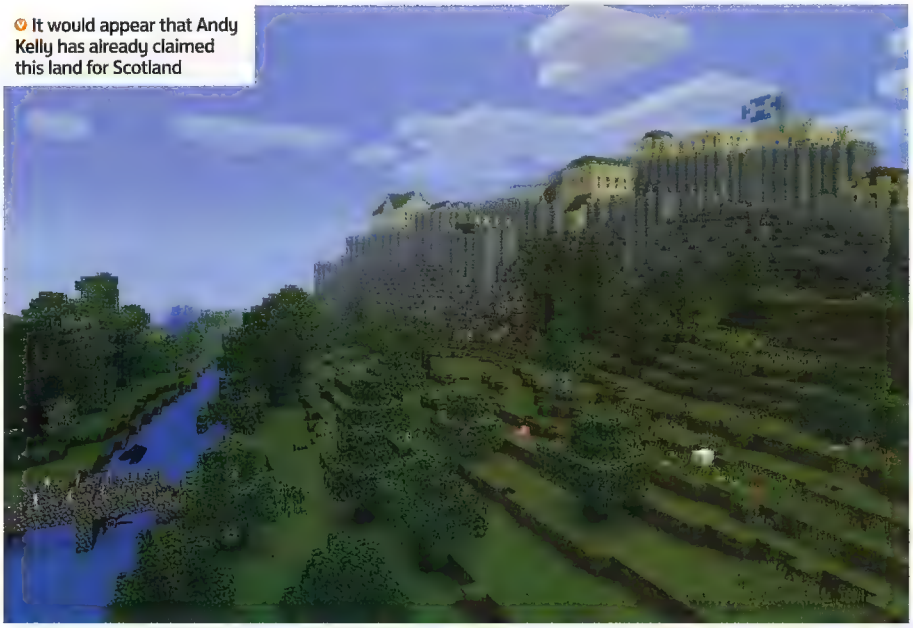
The learning curve can be quite steep initially, but 4J Studios – the team in charge of the Xbox 360 port – have done a superb job of making this more streamlined and user friendly than the PC version. The controls have been mapped nicely to the Xbox controller, and visually it has a steady frame rate and a decent draw distance – although worlds do take longer to generate than on PC.

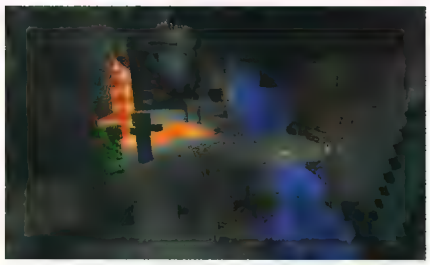
Crafting is easier. A new interface presents all available objects, and tells you exactly what materials you need to make them. On PC, you had to make frequent trips to the *Minecraft* Wiki or learn recipes by accident, but couch-bound console gamers needn't worry about that inconvenience.

As fun as single-player is, it's when you're playing online with friends that its intricacies really shine. When you generate a

### OR TRY THIS...

**BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUTS & BOLTS**
*Allows you to build vehicles from assorted materials*


It would appear that Andy Kelly has already claimed this land for Scotland



You can build your own castles, or muck around in other people's creations online

world, you can select an 'online' option that will allow other players to join you. When you're mining, building and fighting off monsters with other people, it's loads more fun. You can even play local multiplayer via split-screen: just hit the start button on an additional controller to jump into someone's game instantly.

## TEAM BUILDING

Working together to build a bridge across a river, or tunnelling deep into the caves hidden beneath the world is madly addictive, and a uniquely tranquil, slow-paced alternative to the majority of online games. Playing while reclining in a chair with a controller in your hand and a headset is a much more satisfying multiplayer experience than on PC.

From the shared panic of seeing a Creeper hissing at the door of your house – an enemy that explodes when you go near it, potentially destroying hours of hard work – to the feeling of accomplishment after building a cloud-tickling tower, it's one of the most compelling online experiences on Xbox. To show your creations off, you can take screenshots at any time and share them on Facebook by pausing the game and hitting Y.

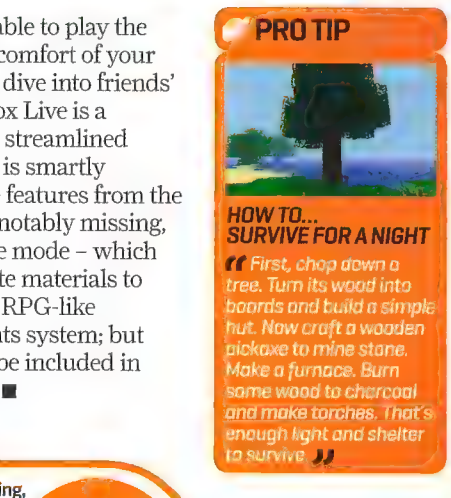
It's just a shame there are no persistent servers. Once the creator of a world logs off, the level is saved, but the other players are curtly booted out. Hopefully future updates – which will be numerous and free – will add some kind of dedicated server system.

But when you consider the logistics of hosting millions of levels for hundreds of thousands of players, it seems unlikely. On PC, servers are handled independently by individuals; but on Xbox Live, there'd have to be one huge great central hub, paid for and maintained by Mojang or Microsoft.

Overall, though, *Minecraft*'s transition to consoles is a success. Being able to play the game from the comfort of your sofa, and easily dive into friends' games over Xbox Live is a delight, and the streamlined crafting system is smartly designed. Some features from the PC version are notably missing, such as Creative mode – which gives you infinite materials to build – and the RPG-like experience points system; but expect these to be included in future updates. ■

## VERDICT

Whether you're mining, crafting, building or fighting – alone, or with friends – there's nothing quite like *Minecraft*. An accomplished, streamlined port




### PRO TIP



**HOW TO... SURVIVE FOR A NIGHT**

*"First, chop down a tree. Turn its wood into boards and build a simple hut. Now craft a wooden pickaxe to mine stone. Make a furnace. Burn some wood to charcoal and make torches. That's enough light and shelter to survive."*

Reviewer
Ben Griffin

Fable Heroes

DETAILS **Publisher** >Microsoft Studios **Developer** >Lionhead **Release** >Out now **Price** >800 MS Points

The popularity of *Fable*'s Hero Dolls clearly inspires the 'cotton and quilts' look

# FABLE HEROES

## Lionhead's B-team takes the reigns for XBLA brawler

### OR TRY THIS...

**CASTLE CRASHERS**
*Want more four-player co-op, but with actual violence and better combat? This'll set you back 1200 points but it's a superior game*

*Heroes* is less a game and more a tribute act; *Fable* in name but not in feel.

Obviously this XBLA-only release is less ambitious, a sidescroller brainstormed by a five-man team on one of Lionhead's annual Creative Days – but they still want your Microsoft Points.

Things look familiar from the off, with hobbes and hollow men, raids on bandit camps and Terry Pratchett-meets-Shrek stylings, but *Heroes* lacks what lies at the series' core: ideas.

### STITCHED UP

Characters have light and heavy attacks (the latter running on a cool-down and costing a heart piece), but there's zero nuance and zero satisfaction. Sure, as long-range mage Garth you *could* deal damage from distance, but there's no penalty for all four characters swarming in like a plague of hand-stitched locusts.

Basically, there's none of *Fable*'s polish. Enemies aren't fun to hit, bosses have too much health, fights against lava trolls and giant beetles go on past the point of fun, and coins don't jingle when you pick them up. That's important, because *Heroes* is built around coins.

After each mission, players are plonked on a *Mario Party* board where they roll dice and splurge on perks. Some are useful (do 50% more damage) and some are joyfully arbitrary (killing things swells the size of your head, or pressing the bumpers pops grins and frowns). Gold can even be shared cross-platform with September release *Fable: The Journey*. Gold, then, is the goal, so why does it have to be so joyless to acquire?

> ***"If gold is the goal, why does it have to be joyless to acquire?"***

Even in offline and online four-player co-op *Heroes* doesn't live up to its name. There are welcome portions of *Zelda: Four Swords*-style competition in the race for health-refilling heart pieces. Deviating paths add replayability, and chests filled with random, helpful or hindering loot contributes a Russian roulette angle (a hobbe costume hides you from enemies, while a curse saps coins), but none of this is game-saving, or indeed game-changing. What remains is a limited, brainless brawler. ■

### VERDICT

Lacking in any decent ideas, falls short on polish and can't even get it together for four-player co-op. In short, it's *Fable* minus the magic

**6.1**

DETAILS Publisher > Telltale Games Developer > [illegible]
Release > Out now Price > [illegible]

# THE WALKING DEAD EP 1: A NEW DAY

## Bring on the invasion and let the rotting bodies hit the floor

There's a question you need to ask yourself before picking up TellTale's *The Walking Dead*: what kind of a fan are you? If you enjoy Rick Grimes strutting around a farm with an oversized gun in HBO's hit series, this isn't for you. This is for comic evangelists, and it's bloody marvellous.

The brilliance is in its immediacy. Playing as convict Lee Everett, *A New Day* gives you and your eight-year-old companion, Clementine, front row seats in the zombie apocalypse.

Your bond with Clem, as well as with others, is everything. Characters react depending on dialogue decisions, and there's a firm emphasis on talking rather than shooting. That isn't to say the game is devoid of any action, but the conversation wheel is your go-to weapon instead of pistols and shotguns.

When problems arise – and they will – you're pushed to think fast in order to escape the terrifyingly tense sequences unearthed. It's a game of lesser evils and twisted moralities. There's never a pleasant solution to any dilemma, and the no-going-back tone is nigh on perfect.

***"There's never a pleasant solution to any dilemma"***

Everything from the aesthetic style to the unlucky cast of survivors feels true to Kirkman's lore and it's refreshing to see TellTale capturing the *Walking Dead* vibe. Whoever thought paternal responsibility could be so bloody great? ■

### VERDICT

[illegible]

9.0

DETAILS Publisher > Microsoft Studios Developer > The Climax Group
Release > Out now Price > 1,200 MS Points

This game looks ace, but combat is poor. Sad

# BLOODFORGE

## A right bloody mess – in every way you don't want it to be

*Bloodforge* joins the ranks of the ever growing list of 'core' XBLA releases. Casting you in the role of Celtic warrior, Crom, you must seek revenge upon those who manipulated you into murdering your wife. And that revenge *might* have been sweet if it didn't come in the form of hack'n'slash gameplay we've seen 100 times before.

Dodgy 'chain together light and heavy attack to execute enemy' combos aside, *Bloodforge*'s strongest asset is its graphic novel-esque art style. The striking desaturated colours complement the vivid red splatters of blood pouring out of every orifice. Even Crom looks great. Erm, apart from his face. Which we can't see, because every character in the game wears a mask. Facial animations. Who needs 'em?

All the pretty stuff is for nothing, though, thanks to the game's hideous camera, which sways side to side as Crom lumbers around battlegrounds like he was balancing on a canoe. Too often we found ourselves disorientated, and unable to see who we were fighting during battles, defeating the object of 'fighting' altogether.

In addition to a four-hour (max) story mode, you can set horde mode-style challenges for friends to compete in. There's also a 'blood duels' multiplayer, which counts the amount of blood spilled during missions and compares said spillage at the end of each level. While this does get a half thumbs up for replayability, we doubt many will be coming back for more. ■

***"Vivid red blood splatters from every orifice"***

### VERDICT

**An ambitious but poor attempt at the crowded hack'n'slash genre. And one of the worst game cameras we've ever seen**

4.0

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# UPGRADE

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HOW TO...

## Fight smarter in THE WITCHER 2

Your guide to beating down enemies and surviving every battle

First ensure that you're using the right weapon for the job [1], as Geralt carries two different blades. Your silver sword should be used against monsters as it deals much more damage than your steel sword, which should be reserved for fighting humanoid foes.

Prepare yourself by drinking potions and applying blade coatings before battles [2] as you can't use potions once the fight has started. This is most important when facing bosses, so if you end up against one without using a potion, restart the fight and immediately hit LB, which should allow you to Meditate and equip the potion if you're quick enough.

When in combat, make use of all the Signs at your disposal [3]. Aard and Igni are ranged spells that weaken enemies; Yrden can be used to trap foes and leave them open to further attack. Quen makes you temporarily invulnerable but your vigour doesn't regenerate while it's in effect, so cast any other Signs you want to use before activating it.

Blocking and parrying can deal decent damage once that skill has been upgraded on the Swordmaster development path [4], but don't fixate on blocking, as it only reduces damage received rather than eliminating it.

Finally, when fighting multiple enemies make sure you don't get trapped in the middle of them [5] or your health will be sapped by attacks from all sides. Run or roll away to escape, then eliminate them one at a time. Use traps or the Yrden Sign to slow enemies down, making it easier to pick them off individually.

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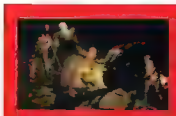
TIPS

### Big games tipped

Master Hoonigan mode in DIRT Showdown, find every artefact in Skyrim, build better guns in Ghost Recon.



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MASTERCLASS

### Dragon's Dogma

Make the most of your Pawns and slay monsters more efficiently with our in-depth guide to this cracking RPG.

124

TECH

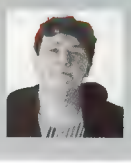
### Smart phones

Take gaming with you, and expand your experiences, using our guide to the best smart phones out there.

This way for more pro-tips and self-improving info from our battle-honed elite squad

## MEET THE EXPERTS

**Name:** Iain Wilson
**Witcher expert**
Iain teaches you how to smash *The Witcher 2*'s gruelling fights.



**Name:** Andy Kelly
**Payne expert**
Smash everyone online using Andy's killer load-out advice.

**Name:** Ben Griffin
**FIFA pro**
Ben plucks out the best teams from this year's UEFA Euro expansion.

**Name:** Andy Hartup
**Ghost rustler**
Make more powerful weapons in Ghost Recon.

# Get the four most bizarre endings in **SILENT HILL 2 HD**

Aliens? Dogs? Necrophilia? Here's our guide to the best ways to finish the game

1

**THE DOG ENDING**
Get all regular endings (Leave, In Water, Maria) then start again. Grab the key from the dog house in Jack's Inn and use it to open the Observation room 3F at Lakeview Hotel.

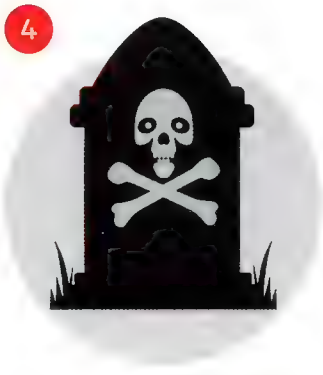
2

**THE ALIEN ENDING**
Get the Blue Gem from Restless Dreams and start a new game. Use it in the hospital garden after the boss fight, in the boat after the Eddie fight, and in room 312 before the video.

3

**THE REBIRTH ENDING**
Finish the game once and start again. Collect the White Chrism, the books of Lost Memories & Crimson Ceremony, and the Obsidian Goblet. Make sure they're in your inventory at the end.

4



**THE MARIA ENDING**
You need to spend as much time with Maria as possible. Keep her well defended, especially in the hospital when Pyramid Head attacks. She'll be resurrected after the final boss fight.

## HOW TO... GET THE BEST APPS ON XBOX

**Transform your Xbox into a media hub with these apps**

**BBC iPlayer**
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**LOVEFiLM**
This has rival service Netflix beat with more on-demand films and TV, and the ability to rent through the post.

**Last.fm**
Until Spotify arrives this is the best resource for music lovers. You set music genres rather than pick specific tracks to play.

**Sky**
Subscribers get the most out of it, but the ability to pause and rewind is invaluable to those without Sky+. You can watch Sky on Xbox by getting an ID, and don't need an original Sky box to do that.

**Facebook**
It may not be the perfect fit for a controller, but this is still top for looking at friends' drunken club snaps, witty opinions and rants.

# Get a hole in one in **TIGER WOODS 13**

Learn to win when you're swinging

1 **Look down course**
Aiming is easy, but *check the elevation*. If you're playing uphill the ball will land short; downhill and it'll go long.

2 **Check the wind**
If you're in need of a straight flight, don't aim into the wind. Remember to use your Draw and Fade to counter it.

3 **Check the lie**
Hitting a ball low will dig it out of bunkers, but also loft it high with backspin. Good for landing the ball square on the green.

Take a leaf out of young Tiger's book: practice endlessly

4 **Adjust your stance**
This shifts your aiming cursor and lets you curve shots around corners or into wind. Remember the angle of that line!

5 **Swing**
See the line, bottom right? Match its direction with the left analogue stick. If the pad rumbles you're not quite on the line.

6 **Control it**
Your thumbstick speed is important. A slow swing will land the ball short and a fast one will send it long.

# Smash Hoonogan mode in **DIRT SHOWDOWN**

Nail the perfect racing line with our expert guide

**1 Pole dancing**
A perfect donut means big points. Tap and release the drift button then steer into the turn. This should give you enough momentum to circle around two or three times.

**2 Chain reaction**
Chaining together stunts boosts your multiplier. The combo window is unforgiving though, so plan your routes from A to B carefully, drifting wherever you can.

**3 Mix it up**
Performing the same move over and over results in a 'Stale' ranking, halving your score, so mix it up. You can do the same move six or so times before you get in trouble.

**4 Colour co-ordinated**
During Smash Attacks, you won't know which colour bollards will be next on your list until the last second, so position yourself at the end of a run to cover all options.

**5 Knock-Off**
During Rampage events, break free from the pack by escaping into an empty corner and then charge at them. In Knock-Out, tipping a rival over the edge scores big.

**6 Marked Man**
Destruction is inevitable, so prolong your run by driving erratically. Don't make your movements easy to predict and stay away from open areas.

# Stay hidden in **GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER**

Tips for keeping it stealthy, balancing the odds, and beating challenges

1

**PLAN AHEAD**
Don't just shoot the first man you see. Chuck a sensor grenade (you should always pack these) into every area before you start killing.

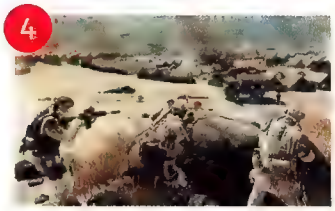
2

**USE YOUR TEAM**
Yes, we know you can pick everyone off yourself, but you get better Ghost ratings for using synchronised shots or ignoring enemies completely.

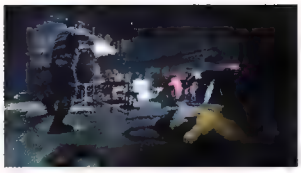
3

**DRONE UP**
If you have a drone, use it. You can hover it over an area indefinitely, and it'll only be spotted if you are. Use it to keep track of moving enemies.

4



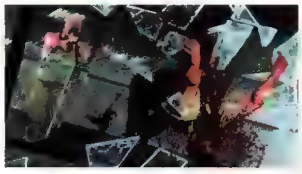
**PICK THE RIGHT KIT**
Certain levels work better with different kit. Always pack a silent weapon (usually your secondary) and always pack one with decent range.



HOW TO...

# Dominate the online modes in **MAX PAYNE 3**

Top tips to help you crush your enemies in slow-motion



**Weight matters**
Heavy weapons hit hard, but they'll reduce your health and speed. Consider taking in an SMG or dual pistols.

**Conserve burst**
Try and resist using Bursts until you fill all three bars. The first two tiers aren't as useful as the third. Don't waste it.

**Special weapons**
If you have a Burst that spawns a rare weapon, you'll keep it even after you die, providing you have some ammo left.

**Always roll**
Keep hitting B while facing off against an opponent. You'll look silly, but hitting a rolling player is much harder.

**Payne killer**
If you become Max or Passos in 'Payne Killer', keep your finger on the D-pad to take painkillers if you're attacked.

**Close quarters**
If you get close to a player, hit B. Melee attacks negate armour and health and are always an instant kill.

# Win **UEFA EURO 2012** in style

Boss the tournament with these top teams

**PORTUGAL**
One word: Ronaldo. He's *FIFA*'s best player after that little Argentinean's out of the picture. Feed him and speed down the flanks, then cut in and shoot audaciously from, well, anywhere really. He makes worldclass winger teammate Nani look ordinary by comparison, but Nani, along with Meireles, are similarly great at shooting from distance.

**ENGLAND**
England are ranked in the top ten here, which is, er, hopeful! They may have all the chemistry of a failed experiment, but in cold hard statistics they're great all-rounders. Your main tactic should be this: use Rooney. He's arguably England's only truly great player, but Joe Hart's a brilliant shot-stopper and freak-o Crouch is fantastic in the air.

**NETHERLANDS**
The Dutch squad is a checklist of brilliant premiership players: Krul, Kuyt, van der Vaart, de Jong. Dependable all over and boasting England's Footballer of the Year winner van Persie up front. He's one of the best finishers the game has to offer, and is also a dab foot at freekicks. Supply him well and watch him rack up the goals.

**ITALY**
Italy has crumbled due to Serie A scandals and aging players, but their solid defence is still nigh on impassable. Goalkeeper Gigi Buffon is a rock, and defenders Abate, Bonucci and Chiellini have top-flight experience. That's footy code for 'they're a bit slow', but what aging Italians lack in pace they make up for in their solid back line.

**SPAIN**
Right, Spain then. 2010 World Cup winners and party to football's best partnership, Iniesta and Xavi. Use them to dominate the midfield, and ignore crosses because, you know, Spanish players are small. It's all about short, snappy passes, penetrating midfields then cutting open defences like a surgeon. With Spain, play the possession game.

**CROATIA**
Croatia are ranked eighth in the FIFA World Rankings for good reason: consistency. Put their dependable 4-4-2 formation to good use, supplying frontman Olić and dribbling with Tottenham's dangerous Modrić. He's particularly dangerous placed outside the box at crosses (he's too tiny for headers) and hitting stray balls from distance.

**GERMANY**
Germany's an old faithful, tearing up England in the last World Cup with brutal counter-attacks. Do likewise with Ozil's creative flourishes and Klose and Gomez's uncanny poaching ability. They're an extremely well-rounded squad, with stout defenders and in Manuel Neuer, one of the best goalies in the game.

**FRANCE**
Gotta love France. They didn't even get past World Cup 2010's very first round – but they've actually got a pretty strong squad. Evra, Ribéry and Nasri have blinding pace down the flanks, giving you the option of either whipping in an early cross for the likes of Benzema, or cutting in and shooting low and hard.

Don't be this guy. Stay sharp, don't get angry, and win loads

## Max W/L in **BATTLEFIELD 3**

Increase your win / loss ratio by learning to play as a team, not just an individual glory-hunter

1 When playing on Conquest, for the bigger maps smaller vehicles (such as buggies) are key to capturing bases faster than your opponents. Get on them right at the spawn.

2 Stay away from jets. They're great to mess around with, but rarely have an impact on the overall game. And they're tough to kill with unless you've unlocked their weapon perks.

3 Forget about your personal kill/death ratio – do things to help the team. Running from tanks isn't going to help your squad – get out there and C4 it! It's for the greater good.

4 In Conquest, smaller maps require squad tactics and good knowledge of the maps. Get squads to flank opponents, and remember: there's more than one path to every flag!

5 When defending in Rush, have a good squad balance. Get a Recon team member to set up a SOFLAM to target all incoming enemy vehicles. Always bring an Engineer to deal with vehicles and Assault to heal.

6 Have several Engineers armed with Javelin missile launchers. SOFLAM laser designated targets will take more damage from these missiles.

*"KEEP AWAY FROM JETS. THEY MAY BE GREAT TO MESS AROUND IN, BUT THEY HAVE LITTLE IMPACT"*

7 In Rush, surround the M-COM stations with Assault and Support soldiers. Set your main line of defence at the station toughest to capture. And don't forget to suppress attackers so they can't get clean shots.

8 When attacking on Rush, go ultra-offensive from the start. Hop in a vehicle and get to the stations as a team before the enemy have time to prepare.

# Get every Daedric artefact in **SKYRIM**

The best kit in the game and where to find it (quests in red)

**Azura's Star**
The Black Star
Speak to Aranea at the Shrine of Azura.

**Dawnbreaker**
The Break Of Dawn
At level 12, visit the Statue to Meridia.

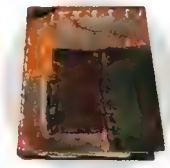
**Ebony Blade**
Whispering Door
Talk to Hulda the barmaid in Whiterun.

**Ebony Mail**
Boethiah's Calling
Go to the Sacellum of Boethiah.

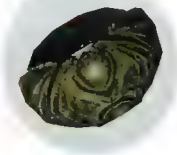
**Mace Of Molag Bal**
House Of Horrors
Help Vigilant Tyranus search the house.

**Clavicus Vile Mask**
Daedra's Best Friend
Talk to Barbas the dog in Falkreath.

**Mehrunes' Razor**
Pieces Of The Past
In Dawnstar, speak to Silus Vesuius.

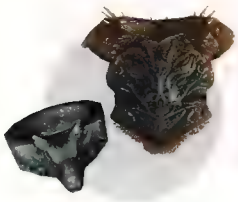


**Oghma Infinium**
Discerning The Transmundane
Find hermit Signus' Outpost.



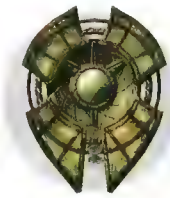
**Ring of Namira**
The Taste Of Death
Speak to Eola inside the Hall of the Dead.

**Sanguine Rose**
Night To Remember
Accept Sam Guevenne's drinking challenge.



**Saviour's Hide**
Ill Met By Moonlight
Choose to kill Sinding the werewolf.

**Skull of Corruption**
Waking Nightmare
Speak to Erandur in the Windpeak Inn.



**Spellbreaker**
The Only Cure
At the Shrine of Peryite, talk to Kesh the Clean.

**Volendrung**
The Cursed Tribe
In Largashbur, help the Orcs defeat the Giant.

**Wabbajack**
Mind Of Madness
At Bards College, speak to beggar Dervenin.

## HOW TO... BOOST YOUR WIRELESS SIGNAL

By Andy Kelly, XBW's resident networking expert

- Keep your router away from loadbearing walls and anything made of metal. Both interfere with the wireless signal, and the closer they are, the weaker your connection will be.
- Change the wireless channel in your router's control panel. Some will be busier than others, and simply switching to another can instantly clear up any connection problems.
- If you use wireless in different rooms, place the router somewhere central to keep the signal spread evenly around the house.
- Regularly update your router's firmware. The big manufacturers frequently make improvements to their networking software. This can be done easily through the admin control panel.

# Keep Shepard alive at the end of **MASS EFFECT 3**

How to get 'the best ending' in BioWare's epic RPG

There's only one way to keep Shep alive. This is how you do it!

**GET READY**
Get your Effective Military Strength as high as possible by completing all available side missions, gathering War Assets via scanning and increasing Readiness by playing multiplayer missions.

**GATHER ASSETS**
Your EMS needs to be at least 5000 going into the final mission unless you've maxed out your Paragon or Renegade reputation – only 4000+ is needed if you use an interrupt to save Anderson.

**TAKE THE RED PATH**
When you're faced with the final decision, choose to destroy the Reapers (red option) then let the ending play out, which finishes with Shepard taking a gasp of air.

MASTERCLASS

# DRAGON'S DOGMA

Dominate Capcom's super tough RPG

## SIX STEPS TO FORM THE ULTIMATE PARTY

How to prepare yourself for battle

1

Is your gear up to date? Visit Gran Soren regularly to upgrade your armour, *and* your Pawns' armour.

2

Dying a lot? You have the wrong party. Find your weakness, go back to the Rift and reform.

3

It's vital that at least one of your Pawns has a two or three-star knowledge rating for the quest you're on.

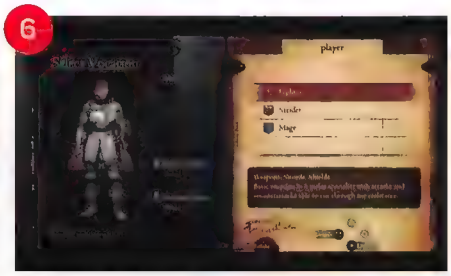
4

Do job board quests, like killing a set number of enemies or animals, for tons of easy XP.

5

Send your Pawns into battle first by pressing ↑ on the d-pad. It gives you extra time to form tactics.

6



Visit an inn in Gran Soren to upgrade to a combo class. Mystic knight is particularly powerful.

## HOW TO KILL A CYCLOPS

Taking down *Dragon's Dogma*'s strongest recurring enemy

1

First, get rid of that club. Hack away at its arm until it drops, as it can totally destroy your party.

2

Climb to the head and hack at it. If you're shaken off, run around to recover stamina, then try again.

3

If it grabs your Pawn, slash at its hand to free them. If it grabs you, press ← on the d-pad to get aid.

**NEXT MONTH**

MAX PAYNE 3

All the tips and tactics you need to get the very best out of Rockstar's grizzled shooter

## MEET THE EXPERT

The man behind this month's tips

**Name** Andy Kelly
**Age** 26
**Expert because...**
Andy has been playing *Dragon's Dogma* since the earliest preview code, and has picked up a lot of knowledge along the way. He knows it's a hard game if you don't have any help

"*Dragon's Dogma* is a really unforgiving game, but in the best possible way. It feels challenging in a way few modern games do, but a lack of signposting and handholding will almost certainly put a lot of people off. Hopefully these tips will help you get over that initial hump and enjoy the game, as it's easily one of the best console RPGs ever."

## TEN EXPERT SURVIVAL TIPS

How to stay alive in the cruel land of Gransys

1. Don't punch above your weight. If a dungeon's foes are too tough, run away, and return when you're stronger.
2. Don't sell raw ingredients dropped by enemies. Instead, visit a weapons store and use them to upgrade your gear.
3. Stick to roads when travelling at night. Powerful monsters lurk in the shadows, and low light makes it hard to fight.
4. Make sure you have one member of every class in your party, as their skills are designed to compliment each other.
5. Upgrade your main Pawn's skills as well as your own when you visit an inn.
6. A great strategy is to let your Pawns do the tanking, and hang back supporting them with magic and healing.
7. Listen to your Pawns. Their tips will help you through the toughest encounters.
8. If your Pawns are saying things like, "How can we possibly beat it?!" you need to get some with better knowledge.
9. You'll find random Pawns wandering around Rift stones in Gransys. Always check their stats, as they can be powerful.
10. If your Pawns can't get near an enemy, pick them up and throw them towards it. Seriously, it works.

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# The XBW TECH TEST

## The best smartphones for 360 gamers rated and slated – to suit any budget

**Mobile phones have developed so quickly in the last few years that making a call on one may be the last thing you think about. With built-in still and video camera capability, audio and video playback, internet access and software upgradability, smartphones are now mini-computers – compatible bridge devices to tablets, notebooks, laptops, desktops, consoles and multimedia devices.**

The first consideration is whether to go Apple or not. Apple's iPhone redefined the technology and is still the one to beat in terms of features and functions; but like other Apple products they lock you into Apple's way of doing things, the iOS operating system restricting the sources and types of add-on applications available.

Phones using the Android operating system have a much wider manufacturer base and more open availability of apps; but there tends to be less quality control, and some apps are a complete waste of money (or time, if they're free). After a slow start, Windows-based phones are becoming competitive, possibly sounding the death-knell for the beleaguered Blackberry platform.

Size, weight and display quality are crucial factors, but the cost of a phone may hardly be significant, as practically all phones can come 'free' if you're paying a monthly service tariff – only if you want to buy a phone that is not locked to a certain service provider does the hardware cost kick in.

£399

XBW'S CHOICE

### HTC ONE X

***Android 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich / 8Mp camera / 130g***

A quad-core 1.5GHz processor powers this amazing handset, which boasts an 8Mp stills / video camera, BeatsAudio HD audio technology, up to 28Gb storage, and a sizeable 4.7 inch full HD touchscreen with 1280 x 720 resolution

★★★★★

£329

ENTRY LEVEL

### SAMSUNG GALAXY S ADVANCE

***Android 2.3 Gingerbread / 5Mp camera / 120g***

Dual-core 1Ghz processing power, a 480x800 pixel display and Find My Missing Phone function.

★★★

£455

MIDRANGE

### NOKIA LUMIA 900

***Windows Phone 7.5 / 8Mp camera / 160g***

Slightly hampered by a mediocre camera and the underdeveloped Windows apps marketplace, but it delivers on design and media functions.

★★★

£490

OLIGARCHS ONLY

### APPLE IPHONE 4S

***Apple iOS 5 / 8Mp camera / 140g***

With the same quad-core processor found in the iPad 2, a hi-res Retina display and voice-recognition system Siri, this is the one to beat.

★★★★★

# BUYER'S GUIDE

## HIGH-END MEDIA PLAYERS

**WD TV Live Hub £150**

This can play almost any file format, and offers gigabit Ethernet connection, HDMI digital AV output, optional Wi-Fi and Internet media streaming functions.

★★★★★

**Sumvision Cyclone Micro 2+ £25.49**

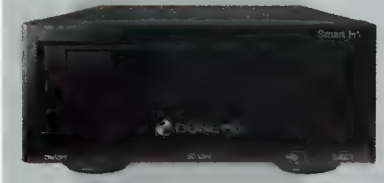
Basic and tiny, but remarkably capable with a wide range of file types up to full HD resolution and a handy SD card slot.

★★★

**AC Ryan PlayonHD Mini 2 £96**

With HDMI 1.3 digital AV output and gigabit Ethernet, this tiny box has silent fanless cooling. Supports many file types.

★★★★



**Dune HD Smart D1 £300**

Powerful, with options for external eSATA or internal SATA hard drives, full 1080p and surround HDMI 1.3 output.

★★★★★

## WHAT THE HELL ARE... GSM, GPRS, 3G and 4G

GSM is the UK's general mobile phone connection standard, while GPRS enables interchange of light email and data. For heavy internet use you need the high-speed data network 3G, although it's a good idea to check your usage against your data package. When the faster 4G arrives (eventually – it's currently being trialled in some UK areas), one sector to benefit will be mobile multiplayer gaming.

# The XBW HOT LIST

## The 25 Xbox 360 games your collection should never be without

Your dream collection starts here. After extensive testing in the Xbox World labs involving at least one fight to the death, we've whittled down the entire Xbox 360 line-up to these 25. This reflects the best on offer right now. Let us know what you think at xbw@futurenet.com.

1

### TESV: Skyrim

**Pub** Bethesda **Dev** Bethesda
**Reviewed** Nov 2011
**Score** 9.5 **RRP** £39.99

Despite the tiny score margin between the top two titles, *Skyrim* remains the game we most ardently recommend. It improves on *Oblivion*, obviously, offering a gigantic fantasy world that feels alive and plausible. Quests are inventive and involving, while customisation of your quest is near-exhaustive, letting you play and explore the world at your own pace and in your own way. It may be beardy, but it's a supreme technical achievement and an experience no Xbox owner should miss. And with hundreds of hours of content, it's probably the best value title on the console as well.

2

### The Orange Box

**Pub** EA/Valve **Dev** Valve
**Reviewed** Oct 2007 **Score** 9.7 **RRP** £49.99

Five monster games in one great package, *The Orange Box* is as close to perfect as gaming – regardless of format – will probably ever get. Only age dulls its incredible appeal.

3

### Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

**Pub** Activision **Dev** Infinity Ward
**Reviewed** Nov 2007 **Score** 9.2 **RRP** £19.99

Ditching the WWII battlefronts that had been the making of the series, Infinity Ward's *Modern Warfare* rewrote the rules and, in doing so, created a monster. A gripping campaign married to peerless multiplayer.

4

### Halo 3

**Pub** Microsoft **Dev** Bungie
**Reviewed** Sep 2007 **Score** 9.5 **RRP** £24.99

There are shooters, and then there's *Halo*. The third entry in Xbox's blockbusting mega-franchise might be starting to age now, but it's still a fan-pleasing masterpiece with a truly incredible multiplayer.

5

### Forza Motorsport 4

**Pub** Microsoft **Dev** Turn 10
**Reviewed** Oct 2011 **Score** 9.6 **RRP** £49.99

The best car selection, handling, online options, physics, tyre models, customisation, livery editor and circuits you'll find in any racing game. *Forza 4* is the last racer you'll ever need.

6

### Mass Effect 3

**Pub** EA **Dev** BioWare
**Reviewed** Mar 2012 **Score** 9.4 **RRP** £49.99

Incredible trilogy-ending action RPG. Looks sharp, the combat rivals most third-person shooters, and some of the big decisions you're forced to make will make you genuinely stop and think. Essential.

7

### Batman Arkham Asylum

**Pub** Eidos **Dev** Rocksteady
**Reviewed** Aug 2009 **Score** 9.5 **RRP** £19.99 (CLASSIC)

In one fell swoop, Rocksteady arrive out of nowhere and deliver not just the greatest superhero game ever, but one of the best games on the system. A smart, gorgeous, thrilling action game, brilliantly realised.

8

### Batman Arkham City

**Pub** Warner Bros **Dev** Rocksteady
**Reviewed** Oct 2011 **Score** 9.6 **RRP** £49.99

A truly huge world filled with the tiniest of details, and a massive campaign supplemented with enough extras and DLC to last you weeks. *Arkham Asylum* tells the better story, but *City* has size on its side.

9

### Dark Souls

**Pub** Namco Bandai **Dev** From Software
**Reviewed** Oct 2011 **Score** 9.6 **RRP** £49.99

The darkest, densest RPG on 360 is one of the hardest games you'll play this side of *Mega Man*, but every *Dark Souls* player can tell war stories that put other RPG plotlines to shame. An immense achievement.

10

### BioShock

**Pub** 2K **Dev** Irrational
**Reviewed** Dec 2007 **Score** 9.4 **RRP** £19.99

Departing from the staid formula that marks out so many Xbox shooters, Irrational's Rapture is one of the all-time great gameworlds, and *BioShock* is one of 360's best shooters. Original, scary, thrilling.

11

## Grand Theft Auto IV

Pub Rockstar Dev Rockstar North
Reviewed Apr 2008 Score 9.8 RRP £19.99

It lacks the sense of fun that marked out the previous games, but *GTA IV* remains a towering achievement formed around a stunningly realised city.

12

## Battlefield 3

Pub EA Dev DICE
Reviewed Nov 2011 Score 9.1 RRP £39.99

Although the singleplayer fails to impress, *BF3*'s multiplayer is peerless. Thanks to smart design every game feels unique, balanced and thrilling.

13

## Super Street Fighter IV

Pub Capcom Dev Capcom
Reviewed Apr 2010 Score 9.5 RRP £29.99

After too long away, *Street Fighter IV* felt like a return to greatness, not just for the classic franchise, but for the beat-'em-up genre as a whole.

14

## Rock Band 3

Pub EA Dev Harmonix
Reviewed Oct 2010 Score 9.5 RRP £49.99

Rhythm action games will always be an acquired taste, but with the third full *Rock Band* release, Harmonix brings you the definitive package.

15

## Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Pub Square Enix Dev Eidos Montreal
Reviewed Nov 2010 Score 9.4 RRP £49.99

Massive, ambitious and thoroughly brilliant, the Aug-based yarn turns out to be three different games at once, and all of them are outstanding.

16

## Portal 2

Pub Valve Dev Valve
Reviewed Apr 2011 Score 9.2 RRP £49.99

Another Valve classic, the second space-bending *Portal* is a massive and wonderful sequel, as sinister and witty as it is brain-bruisingly challenging.

17

## Modern Warfare 3

Pub Activision Dev Infinity Ward
Reviewed Nov 2011 Score 9.1 RRP £39.99

A rip-roaring round-the-world trip filled with slick violence and massive set-pieces. Online is a measured, fierce twitch-shooter. *COD* back on form.

18

## Gears of War

Pub Microsoft Dev Epic Reviewed Nov 2006
Score 9.3 RRP £19.99

The sequel focuses on spectacle and drama, but the original is about cover and killing. It makes for a brilliant, taut and daring firefight.

19

## Red Dead Redemption

Pub Rockstar Dev Rockstar San Diego
Reviewed Aug 2010 Score 9.4 RRP £49.99

Another blistering open world from Rockstar, *Red Dead* is a vast, ambitious and beautiful Western, reinforced by great characters and terrific acting.

20

## Bayonetta

Pub Sega Dev Platinum
Reviewed Jan 2010 Score 9.1 RRP £49.99

Violence, creativity and filthy sauciness – *Bayonetta* has the lot in a game so far beyond the likes of *God of War* it's barely part of the same genre.

21

## Mass Effect 2

Pub EA Dev BioWare
Reviewed Mar 2010 Score 9.0 RRP £49.99

The first game had its problems, but for this sequel BioWare honed and refined every element, delivering a stunning tale of galaxy-wide conflict.

22

## Hitman: Blood Money

Pub Eidos Dev IO Reviewed Jun 2006
Score 8.9 RRP £19.99

Twelve flawless vignettes that offer endlessly inventive opportunities for creative murder and build to one of gaming's standout finales.

23

## Assassin's Creed II

Pub Ubisoft Dev Ubisoft Montreal
Reviewed Jan 2010 Score 9.3 RRP £19.99

This astonishing sequel expands on the achievements of the original, adding better combat, more varied missions and a chance to forge your own route.

24

## The Witcher 2

Pub Namco Dev CD Projekt
Reviewed Jul 2012 Score 9.1 RRP £39.99

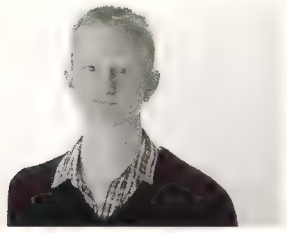
Very adult, very dark RPG. Its fantasy world may not be as sizeable as *Skyrim*, but it is richer and filled with more convincing characters. Tough, but great.

25

## Braid

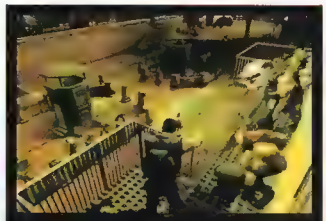
Pub Microsoft Dev Number None, Inc.
Reviewed Aug 2008 Score 9.4 RRP £6.85

That Jon Blow's cerebral platformer is a Live game being rated alongside retail releases says it all. *Braid* is a work of art in every sense, and *must* be explored.



"We've got a new boy in the Hot List this month. Welcome The Witcher 2, which forces its way in thanks to it's rich fantasy world, brutal combat, and the fact that it isn't afraid to show some skin. Last month's other RPG Dragon's Dogma? Sadly, it didn't make the cut. Nor did acclaimed XBLA puzzle game Fez. Unfair? Let us know via Facebook or on Twitter (@XboxWorldMag)"

**Andy Hartup**



## XBOX REWIND: FREEDOM FIGHTERS

*Before Kane & Lynch, before Homefront*

Back before they made distinctly average shooters like *Kane & Lynch* and bizarre adventure games like *Mini Ninjas*, IO Interactive (who also make Hitman) created *Freedom Fighters*. Set during a fictional Russian invasion of the US, this game has squad shooting, decent third-person action, and oppressive atmosphere in spades. *Freedom Fighters* is showing its age next to the likes of *Gears of War 3* and *Crysis 2*, but the core story is one of the best underdog tales we've played, and the action reminds us IO can still do stealth *and* shooting.

XBOX
WORLD
NEXT

# ASSASSIN'S CREED III

*We travel to Ubisoft Montreal to bring you the killer exclusive everyone else wanted*

## FULL REPORT FROM E3 2012

**Featuring**

*Resident Evil 6*
*BioShock Infinite*
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*Halo 4*
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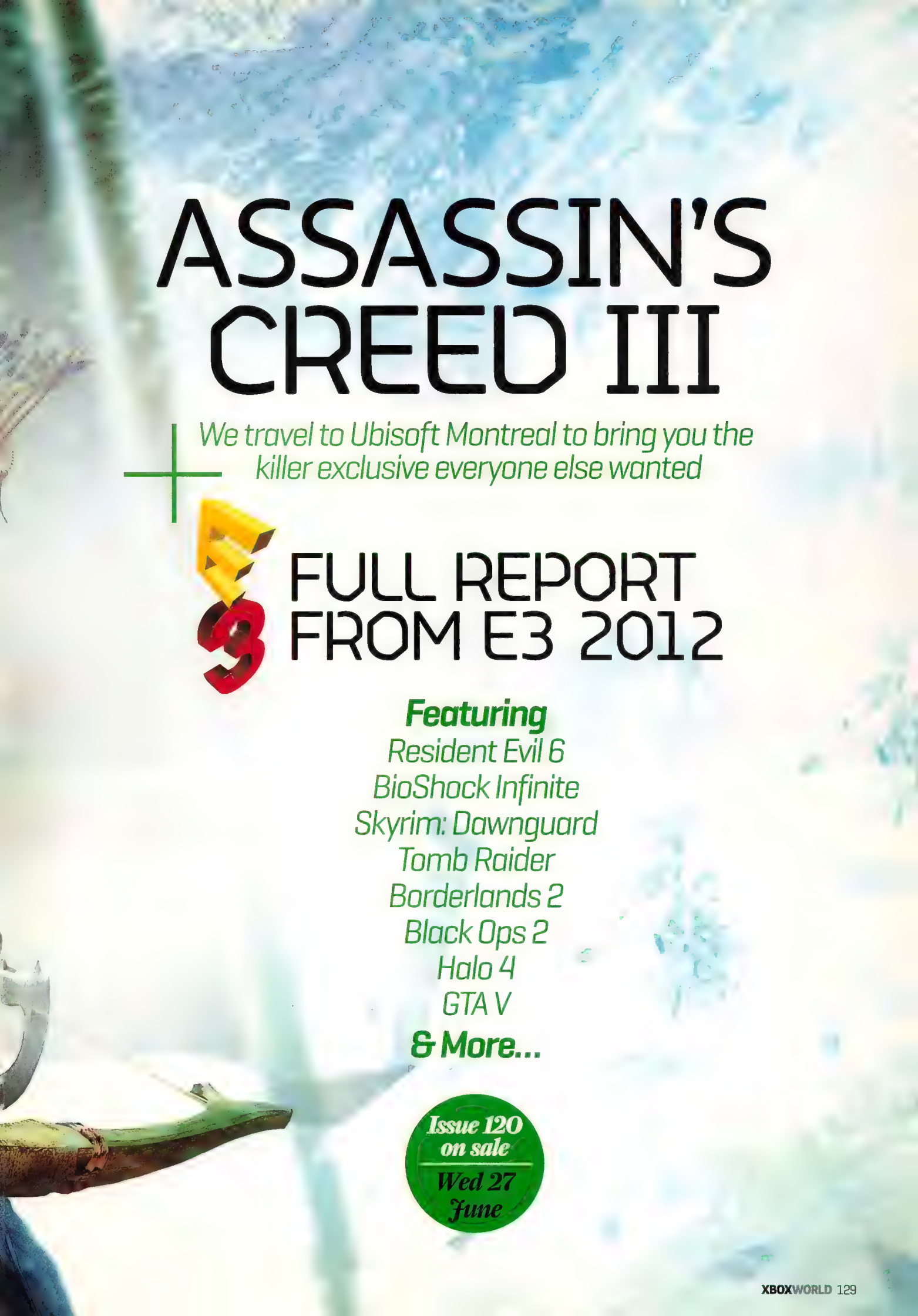

# Best Served Cold

## Fallout New Vegas fails to turn the other cheek

**DETAILS** **Format** > Xbox 360 **Publisher** > Bethesda **Developer** > Obsidian Entertainment **Released** > October 2010 **Achievements** > 75

**The Courier sure has got his hands full in the radioactive Mojave. There's enigmatic Mr House, errant Securitron Yes Man, Caesar and his brutal Legion, the goody-goody NCR... They've all got their eyes on the New Vegas prize, and they all want our help.**

And then there's Benny. His smart-aleck, ever-so-punchable gob was the last thing we saw (heck, the last thing we thought we'd *ever* see) as he uttered the fateful line, "The truth is, the game was rigged from the start." After that, things got a little fuzzy... Turns out we were bound, gagged, shot in the face and tossed into an unmarked grave at Goodsprings cemetery. Being a post-apocalyptic errand boy has its occupational hazards.

Life doesn't often deal a second hand, but special things can happen in Vegas and before long we're stalking the wastelands looking for answers. Our journey takes us to slaver king Caesar's camp. Rotten to the core, he has one treat in store when we pledge assistance to his autocratic cause – a bound and beaten Benny, whose wretched fate is now ours to decide. Should we buddy up with Benny and help him escape? Challenge him to an honourable machete duel in Caesar's arena? Or simply give the charlatan the mercy he deserves: *none*.

It's time to leave camp. Gazing back into the setting sun, you'll squint at the forlorn figure suspended from his new home on the hillside – a crucifix. Benny was at least right on one note: the game was rigged from the start... just not the way he figured. ■

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